

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound



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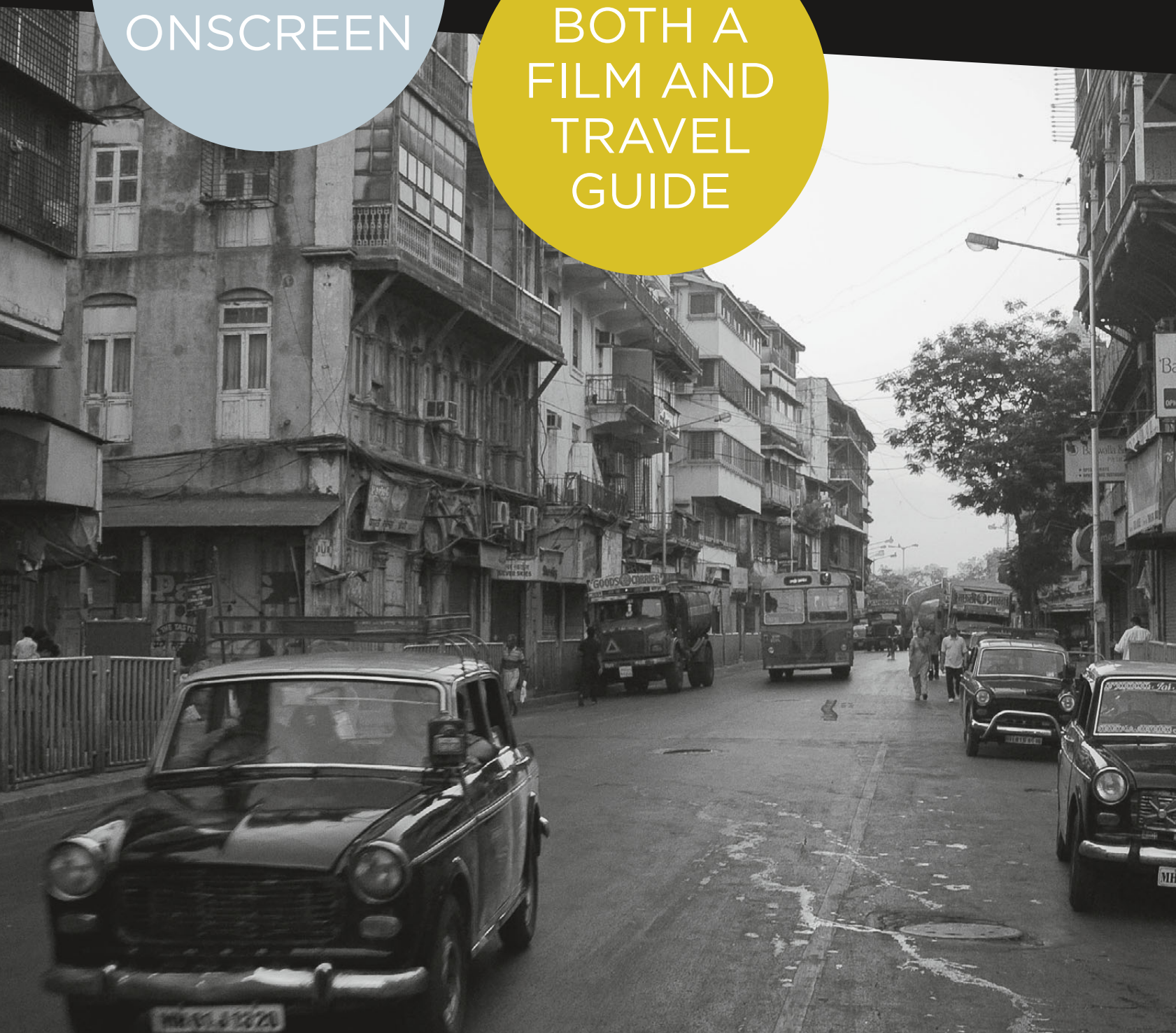






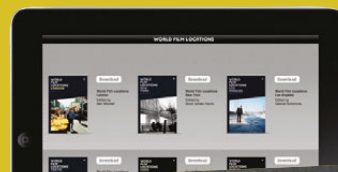
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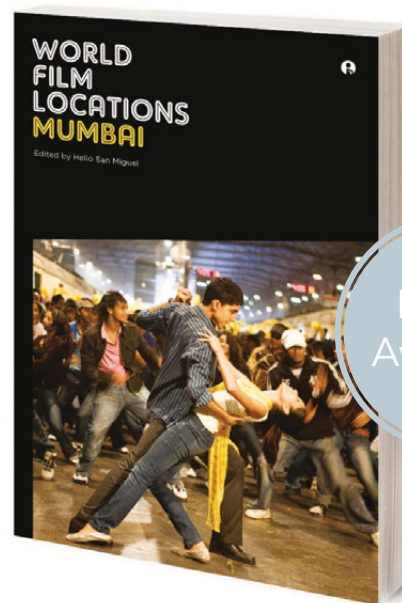
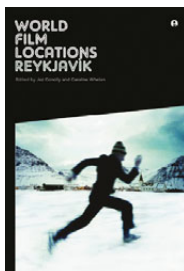
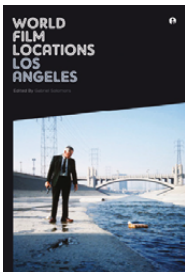
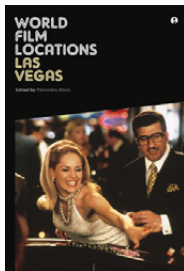
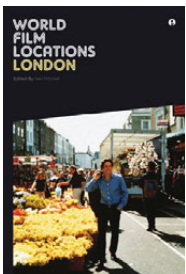
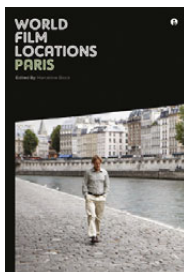
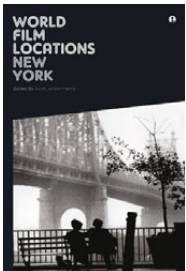
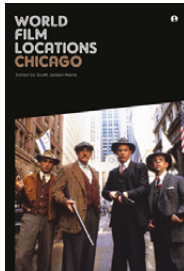
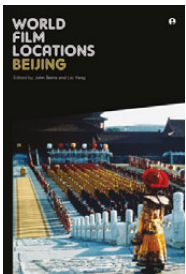


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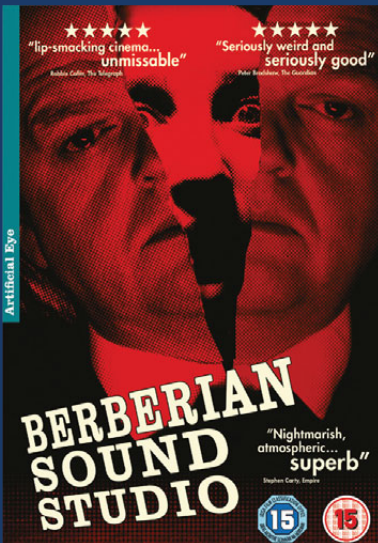
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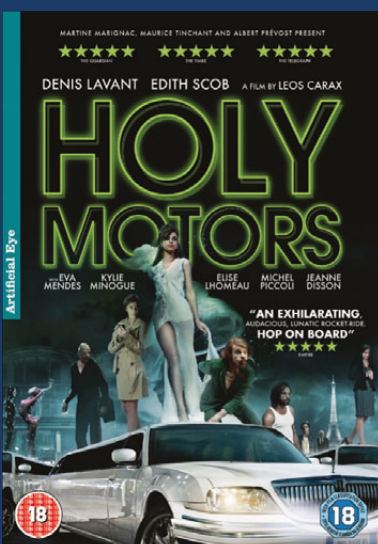


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*The image above instantly conjures up the words 'film noir'. It's not just the sheer blackness of those shadows, but the way the actors' pose (it's Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner in 'The Killers', of course) simultaneously suggests romantic intimacy and threat – look at that claw-like black hand. In this month's Deep Focus (p.56), we don't return to the 1940s heyday of noir, but look at the enduring influence of this mélange of mood, theme and style on filmmakers in the 21st century, from Mann and Nolan to*

*Ceylan and Lynch. Another genre receiving an extreme makeover this month is the western, as we unpick the web of references at the heart of Tarantino's 'Django Unchained' (p.34), starring cover star Jamie Foxx as a slave-turned-gunslinger. And if you'd prefer a more reasoned take on emancipation, in this unusually US-centric issue, there's 'Lincoln' (p.50). Spielberg's film has sparked controversy in the US – but nothing compared to the firestorm now engulfing 'Zero Dark Thirty' (p.9 and p.30). **Nick James***



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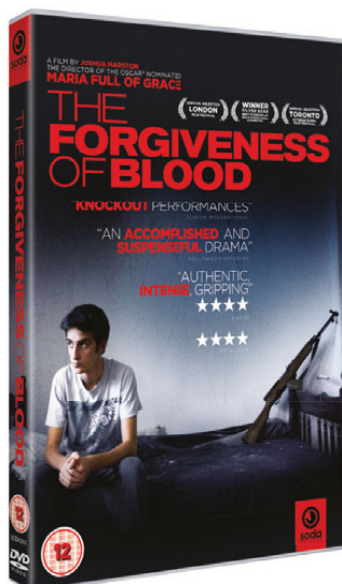
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## Duty Calls

Kathryn Bigelow's acclaimed new feature *Zero Dark Thirty*, about the hunt for Osama bin Laden, arrives just 18 months after the climactic kill mission it depicts. But is such haste at the expense of perspective, asks **Michael Atkinson**

### FEATURES

34  
**COVER FEATURE:**  
**Trail Blazer** In *Django Unchained*, Quentin Tarantino addresses the vexed subject of American slavery – spaghetti-western style. By **Kim Newman** PLUS **Tim Lucas** on the cinematic roots of *Django Unchained*

40  
**Polanski and the Grotesque**  
A new season reveals the collision of reality and the surreal in the director's work. By **Philip Horne** PLUS **Michael Brooke** on the Polish years, and **Charles Barr** on his work with Tynan

40



46  
**Boom and Bust**  
Lenny Abrahamson's *What Richard Did* delves into the fallout from the demise of the Celtic Tiger, finds **Trevor Johnston**

50  
**Mister Freedom**  
**Graham Fuller** investigates the position of *Lincoln* within Steven Spielberg's oeuvre and examines the range of receptions that greeted its US release

56  
**DEEP FOCUS: 21st Century Noir**  
The crucial elements of *noir* – violence, sex, memory and identity – remain as germane to today's leading filmmakers as to last century's, argues **Nick James**

### REGULARS

9 **Editorial** Zero tolerance  
28 **Reader Offers**

#### Rushes

10 **Michael Koresky** celebrates the tone of effortless ease at the heart of screwball  
12 **Object Lesson: Hannah McGill** on film's troubled treatment of changes to gender  
15 **First Sight: Anton Bitel** talks to Jen and Sylvia Soska about *American Mary*  
17 **Dispatches: Mark Cousins** on the architecture of *Amour*

#### The Industry

18 **Development Tale: Charles Gant** on the interrupted gestation of *The Liability*  
19 **The Numbers: Charles Gant** reviews the year's arthouse fortunes  
20 **Set Report: Ashley Clarke** on an innovative 'urban' British comedy  
23 **Profile: Nick Roddick** on Russian film ambassador Catherine Mtsitouridze

#### Festivals

24 **Nick James** on Morelia's unique charms  
26 **Simon Merle** reports from Rome  
27 **James Bell** reports from Tokyo

#### Wide Angle

66 **Brian Dillon** previews the first UK survey of video artist Gerard Byrne  
68 **Soundings: Frances Morgan** on the innovative soundtrack of *Performance*  
69 **Primal Screen: Matthew Sweet** pays tribute to the first four-legged film stars  
70 **Gonzalo de Lucas** celebrates the heartfelt film criticism of Serge Daney  
71 **Carlos Losilla** finds fascinating signposts to new directions at Seville  
72 **Bradlands: Brad Stevens** asks what musicians offer when they make films  
73 **Lost and Found: Chris Darke** on Chris Petit's knowing neo-noir *Chinese Boxes*

#### Forum

74 **Kieron Corless** investigates the new currency of the newsreel format and hears from three filmmakers embracing its potential: **Jem Cohen**, **Sylvain George** and **Alex Reuben** PLUS **Rebecca Vick** on the history of the newsreel in Britain  
77 **Letters**

#### Endings

128 **David Jenkins** on *Big Night*



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TIME OUT

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UN CERTAIN REGARD  
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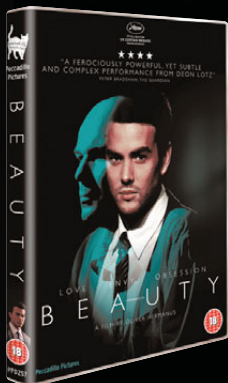
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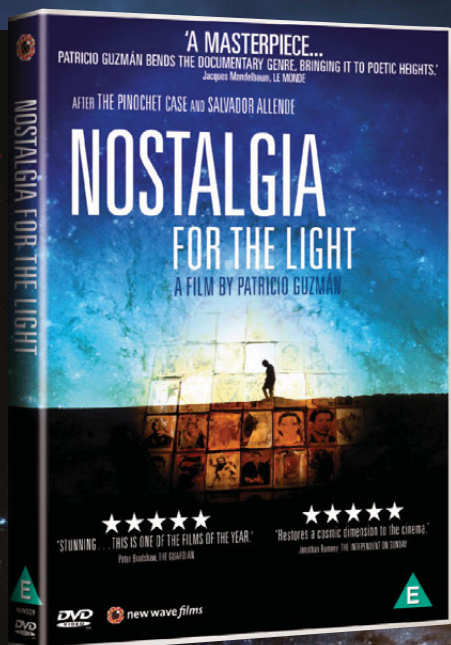
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**COVER**

Jamie Foxx in Quentin Tarantino's 'Django Unchained'  
Retouched by DawkinsColour

**NEXT ISSUE**

on sale 12 February

## Contents Reviews

**FILMS OF THE MONTH**

- 80 *Antiviral*
- 82 *Bullhead*
- 84 *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet*
- 86 *Zero Dark Thirty*

**FILMS**

- 88 *American Mary*
- 88 *Ballroom Dancer*
- 89 *Bullet to the Head*
- 90 *Code Name: Geronimo*
- 90 *Django Unchained*
- 91 *Do Elephants Pray?*
- 92 *Everyday*
- 93 *Flight*
- 94 *Hitchcock*
- 94 *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*
- 95 *Hyde Park on Hudson*
- 96 *I Give It a Year*
- 98 *I Wish*
- 99 *Jack Reacher*
- 99 *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*
- 100 *The Liability*
- 101 *A Liar's Autobiography: The Untrue Story of Monty Python's Graham Chapman*
- 101 *Lincoln*
- 102 *May I Kill U?*
- 103 *Midnight Son*
- 104 *Les Misérables*
- 105 *Playing for Keeps*
- 105 *The Punk Syndrome*
- 106 *The Sessions*
- 107 *Song for Marion*
- 108 *So Undercover*
- 108 *UFO*
- 108 *V/H/S*
- 109 *What Richard Did*
- 110 *Wreck-It Ralph*

**HOME CINEMA**

- 112 *Abraham Lincoln, Les Amants de Montparnasse, Dance Hall, Excision, The Funhouse, In the Mood for Love, Nowhere to Go, Purple Noon (Plein Soleil), Ramrod, Red Dust, Rosemary's Baby, Les Soeurs Brontë, Sunday Bloody Sunday, W+B Hein: Materialfilme 1968-1976*

**DVD features**

- 112 **Philip Kemp** on René Clément's early promise
- 115 **Kate Stables** discovers Pathé's early colour 'fairy film' fantasias
- 118 **James Blackford** has his appetite whetted by *Zombie Flesh Eaters*
- Television**
- 121 *Accused, Connie, Luck – Season 1, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

**BOOKS**

- 122 **Kevin Jackson** hails the loquacious charms of Richard Burton's diaries
- 123 **Jasper Sharp** pries the lid off North Korean cinema culture
- 124 **Kim Newman** assesses Taschen's mammoth tome from the 007 files
- 124 **Ian Christie** appraises a collection of essays on early cinema



84



91



108



101

**And online this month** Video essays: the evolution of animal CGI | Tarantino and race | Yamamura Koji interview | Amitabh Bachhan and Hindi Cinema, and more [bfi.org.uk/sightsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightsound)





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# Editorial Nick James



## ZERO TOLERANCE

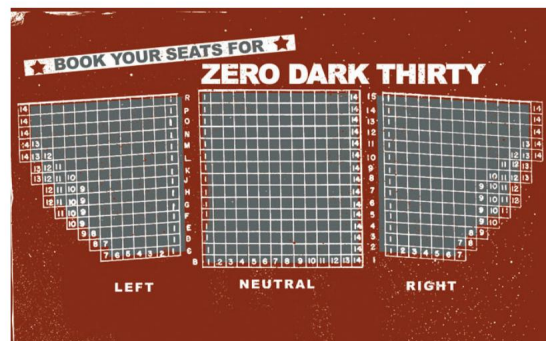
A claim I make regularly about this magazine is that we're a broad church, containing a range of tastes and opinion. There are no deliberate editorial lines pushed by the editorial team beyond the promotion of excellence in film and television. One consequence of that approach is that we sometimes publish opinions with which I disagree. Usually, it's easy to bear, because the difference is just a matter of taste. Once in a while, however, I read an article and feel that the film I saw bears little relation to the one the writer is describing.

It's not all that surprising – preconceptions, word-of-mouth, hype and screening conditions all conspire to make watching films a subjective experience. Most people have sat next to someone who's hating, noisily, a film that's enrapturing them (a screening of Carlos Reygadas's *Silent Light* comes to mind). You can also find yourself exasperated in a screening that many others are absorbing reverently – as has happened to me a few times in Cannes. Or you can find yourself, as I did this month, in contention with your own writers about a film of political importance.

I'm referring to Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty*, which impressed me as one of the most intelligent cinematic renderings of real events I'd seen in a while. So fundamental to recent history are the issues the film raises, that it has been the focus of fierce debate. It was certainly a candidate for our cover until the possibility of an interview with Bigelow evaporated because of illness and the pressure of the Oscar campaign. That the film is in the running for the Oscars has, I believe, influenced its reception negatively, and I was surprised by how quickly it was savaged by the Left in the US as a piece of military triumphalism. But both Michael Atkinson in his feature piece (see p.30) and Guy Westwell in his review (see p.86) concur forcefully with that view. And *S&S*'s contribution is just a part of a fascinating debate about interpretation that, as you may have noticed, has spun out across the media.

Put simply, the most urgent points Atkinson makes are: a) that Bigelow's procedural through-line sequence of events makes a revelation gained under torture pivotal to finding bin Laden, when it's been shown that CIA 'black ops' interrogations had no such success; and b) that it's simply too soon to get a proper perspective on the ten-year struggle

*I was surprised by how quickly 'Zero Dark Thirty' was savaged by the Left as a piece of military triumphalism. But both Michael Atkinson and Guy Westwell concur with that view*



between the CIA and al-Qaeda. As Westwell puts it, the film "lends a purifying coherence to the chaos and contingency of the recent past". Pieces by Jane Mayer in *The New Yorker*, Peter Maas in *The Atlantic* and Glen Greenwald in *The Guardian* have made similar points.

Having published our articles, it would be an act of bad faith on my part to attack them. But my position on the film, for the record, is that it portrays the pursuit of bin Laden as a pyrrhic victory, gained by immoral means, and that the weight of every violent action is felt to an unusual degree. My interpretation of the final scene is that Jessica Chastain's protagonist, Maya – the most determined of the CIA's pursuers – is portrayed as someone with no friends, who ends up realising that shooting bin Laden has achieved nothing much. That's a radically different reading from Westwell's, as you will see. The reviews I've read that are closest to my own take are by Manohla Dargis for *The New York Times*, Ignatiy Vishnevetsky for *MUBI* and John Powers for *Vogue*.

The debate is too complicated and important to explore more deeply here, but if you haven't already looked into it, I encourage you to read all of the above. Of course the real issue here is torture. There's a lot of quibbling around whether torture played any part in tracking down bin Laden. I don't believe the film condones it, but several US senators have written to Sony (parent company of its US distributor Columbia Pictures) complaining that the film is "factually inaccurate" in this matter.

*Zero Dark Thirty* seems to me a far more thoughtful rendering of a conflict than, say, *Argo*; there is one aspect of the debate, however, where I too find Bigelow off-beam, and which arms her detractors. She told *The New Yorker*, "The film doesn't have an agenda, and it doesn't judge. I wanted a boots-on-the-ground experience." To make such a claim about subject-matter like this is naive at best. To use, if I may, our own editorial policy as an analogy: we might, as I said, offer a range of opinion, but I would never say that amounted to no opinion. Every edit creates a judgement, whether it's on a film or in a magazine. **S**



IN THE FRAME

## FUNNY BUSINESS



Three's a crowd: Mitchell Leisen's 'Midnight' (1939)

The evolution of the classic Golden Age screwball comedy in the 1930s and 40s paints a picture of the growth of Hollywood itself

**By Michael Koresky**

Though difficult to fully parse, the term 'screwball' continues to be trotted out every so often to help define a particular brand of romantic-comic filmmaking. Most recently it was bandied about for David O. Russell's *Silver Linings Playbook*, presumably because its central couple, played by Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper, engage in almost nonstop aggressive banter. Crucially, Russell's film also takes as its subject mental illness, in a sense providing explanation for the superhuman loquaciousness and confrontational behaviour of its ultimately amorous leads. He is an undiagnosed bipolar with severe mood swings; she is in mourning over her husband's death, her depression and anger manifesting as an unapologetic nymphomania; both are on prescription medication. In other words, one cannot simply take pleasure in their repartee, for it is a symptom of profound damage. This is an important clue that we're *not* watching a screwball comedy. Because screwball comedies don't make excuses.

That's not to imply that these films were ever simply larks. Golden Age screwball comedies, if not taboo-busting (most of them were made, after all, in the first decade of the Hays Production Code's strict enforcement), still managed to subvert social norms and viewer expectations in terms of gender, sexuality and class. The term 'screwball' was coined by a publicist; like so many monikers given to film movements (*noir*, poetic realism), there's something fuzzy and imprecise about it, evoking images the movies themselves do not quite capture. It's the specific cinematic attitude, as well as a social moment, that the word now invokes that matters. Charting the gradual invention of the screwball comedy, from its heyday of the 1930s to mid-40s, paints a picture of the growth of Hollywood itself.

Ernst Lubitsch laid the groundwork. The German director didn't find his legendary

### A Place in the Sun

George Stevens's 1951 film about a man caught between the woman he has got pregnant and the woman he loves features Montgomery Clift and Elizabeth Taylor at their most glamorous. It's rereleased at BFI Southbank, London, on 1 February.



### Yamanaka Sadao

The Japanese director Yamanaka Sadao is often compared with Jean Vigo: both men died in their twenties leaving a vital and influential body of work. Yamanaka's 'Humanity and Paper Balloons' has been praised by Donald Richie as "one of the great Japanese films" and until now was the only film by him available on DVD in the West. Masters of Cinema's forthcoming set, due for release in April, collects the complete surviving films of a pioneering filmmaker.



ON OUR  
RADAR



Gregory La Cava's 'My Man Godfrey' (1936)

'touch' in the US until he was able to experiment with sound cinema, producing a series of Ruritanian musicals – such as *The Love Parade* (1929) – and elegant, devil-may-care comedies (*Trouble in Paradise*, 1932) that were typified by insouciantly performed battles of the sexes. Representative of an aspirational, Eurocentric cosmopolitanism, such films were pure escapism for a Depression-burdened populace. They appealed to the Eastern-European émigrés who had founded and continued to run Hollywood; they were American dreamers, after all, with one foot still in the Old World. With their continental sensibility, effortless sensuality and seen-it-all irony, these films led straight to something more barbed and class-conscious.

After the runaway success of Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), which put a dissatisfied heiress (Claudette Colbert) and a charmingly acidic journalist (Clark Gable) in tight motel quarters, a new form seemed to have appeared – one that crossed social and sexual boundaries with ease. Capra would move on to more do-gooder entertainments, leaving the light-lifting of the screwball comedy to such clockwork-precise filmmakers as Leo McCarey, Howard Hawks, Preston Sturges and George Cukor. Meanwhile, stars were born (Irene Dunne, Jean Arthur, James Stewart) and others finally found a niche (Cary Grant, Carole Lombard, Rosalind Russell).

*The key to acting in these films wasn't simply fast-talking; it was projecting ease with one's body and one's social milieu*



Howard Hawks's 'His Girl Friday' (1940)

The key to acting in these films wasn't simply adeptness at fast-talking; it was projecting ease with one's body, one's words, one's social milieu. Depending on whom you're trading quips with, the platonic ideal of the screwball comedy is either Gregory La Cava's *My Man Godfrey* (1936), in which dizzy socialite Lombard hires a bum, played by William Powell, to be her butler and promptly falls for him; McCarey's *The Awful Truth* (1937), with divorcees Dunne and Grant indulging in public games of humiliating one-upmanship; or Hawks's *His Girl Friday* (1940), the newspaper-room comedy as swift and stinging as a paper cut, starring Grant and Russell, never more motor-mouthed. Each of these remains a gas, but leave room for Mitchell Leisen's marvellous *Midnight* (1939), an exhilaratingly convoluted whip-lasher in which Colbert finds herself at the centre of a maelstrom of mistaken identities in Paris. Leisen's approach is atmospheric and visually spacious, using more shadows and elaborate long takes than his peers commonly did – appropriate for a film that's at heart a fairytale. Its title even hangs over the film ominously: "Every Cinderella has a midnight," Colbert says, anticipating reality to come crashing in.

As Cinderella learned at the ball, all good things must end, and the screwball comedy, in its perfect form, didn't survive long past the war. By the early 40s, social realism had even seeped into Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), which felt the need to defend itself, preaching that comedy was indeed important. Did Sturges, like David O. Russell, not know that excuses aren't necessary for outrageous behaviour? **S**

**i** A season of screwball comedies plays at BFI Southbank, London, throughout January

## ANATOMY OF A MOVIE ANTIVIRAL

22% Shivers (1975)

16% Videodrome (1983)

12% Soylent Green (1973)

11% Gattaca (1997)

10% Being John Malkovich

9% Re-Animator (1985)

8% Society (1989)

7% The Truman Show (1998)

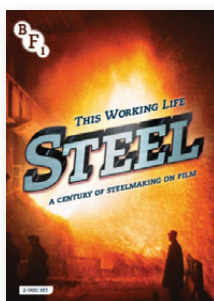
3% Cronos (1993)

2% The Crazies (1973)



### This Working Life: Steel

Following projects on coal and shipbuilding, the BFI National Archive's latest major non-fiction project focuses on the UK's steel industry, with a season of related films at BFI Southbank, London, in February, followed by the release of a DVD box-set.



### Shane Carruth

Carruth's 2004 micro-budget debut 'Primer' was one of the most fascinating, inventive and perplexing sci-fi films of recent years. Now Carruth has finally completed his follow-up, 'Upstream Colour', which premieres at January's Sundance Film Festival. A UK release will hopefully follow later this year.



### Jazz on Film...

Following their fantastic 2011 collection of 'Film Noir' jazz soundtracks, the second volume of Jazzwise magazine's Jazz on Film... series is out now. Entitled 'Beat, Square & Cool', the set collects soundtracks including Duke Ellington's for 'Paris Blues' and Freddie Redd's for 'The Connection'.





# IF IT'S NOT ONE THING...

From Fassbinder to Almodóvar, filmmakers have often presented gender transitions in terms of body horror, madness or political crisis



**By Hannah McGill**

Elvira began life as Erwin and when she was a he, he took his childhood sweetheart Irene for romantic walks around the

slaughterhouse in which he worked. The carnage they witnessed there prefigured the butchery that Erwin would later invite upon his own body in submitting to a sex change, to suit a male lover who says that he could only love Erwin if Erwin were a girl.

Butchery? Submission? Is it cool to use such loaded terms to describe a gender reassignment? Perhaps, when discussing Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *In a Year with Thirteen Moons* (1978), in which Erwin/Elvira is not so much a person landed with ill-fitting biology and gender as a people-pleaser so malleable and directionless that his/her gender identity proves just one more necessary sacrifice on the altar of acceptability. This notion of gender as an inconvenient bar to true love takes us back to Sonnet 20 – though Shakespeare never imagined a surgical solution, instead sadly concluding that his male preoccupation's possession of “one thing” renders him “prick'd... out for women's pleasure”, and thus out of sexual bounds. John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) – which pays explicit if not mildly plagiaristic tribute to Fassbinder in its deployment of an operatically self-pitying, sexually unreconciled diva protagonist to embody a post-war Germany in the throes of continual personality crisis – goes further back, to Plato, to explain the actions of its protagonist. Hedwig, like Erwin/Elvira, switches sex for a partner; in the back of his/her mind is Plato's notion of incomplete bodies seeking their other halves.

Between *Thirteen Moons* and *Hedwig* had come *The Crying Game* (1992), with its shock attack on the heterosexual male gaze; the major stage draw that is *The Lady Boys of Bangkok*; and the mainstream celebrity of the US drag performer RuPaul, to name but a few challenges to gender fixity. But *Hedwig* doesn't exactly push its hero(ine)'s freedom to choose, or his/her sui-gender fabulousness. As in *Thirteen Moons*, gender change is a misguided romantic gesture, and a painful, bloody one. It's the outcome of a desperate urge to belong to, rather than to be, someone else. The prolonged and harrowing slaughterhouse scenes in *Thirteen Moons* and the violent language in *Hedwig* (“When I woke up from the operation I was bleeding down there/I was bleeding from the gash between my legs/My first day as a woman, and already it's that time of the month”) show us gender as body horror. Elvira might primp with veils and lipstick, Hedwig do herself up with more feminine frills than most cis



**Butchered:** Volker Spengler as Elvira in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *'In a Year of Thirteen Moons'* (1978)

women; but what they've both really been through is expressed when the knife of *Thirteen Moons'* anonymous abattoir worker slices off the skin of an anonymous abattoir cow. Cow becomes meat; man becomes woman; the undesirable matter of Nazi history is hacked off the German body politic and discarded.

But just as Hedwig can't disguise or ignore the “one-inch mound of flesh” that she describes as “what I have to work with”, and Erwin pleases neither the straight men for whom he's too masculine nor the gay lovers to whom he'll always lack Shakespeare's crucial “thing”, so post-war Germany can't quite close the door on the slaughterhouse of its recent past. The stink will rise; blood will out; history will replay itself in the cycles of submission and

domination, duplicity and denial that form the dysfunctional personal relationship.

The knife slitting skin in *Thirteen Moons* of course references the rumoured Nazi lampshades made from Jews' skin. It also recalls Georges Franju's 1949 documentary short *Le Sang des bêtes*, which dispassionately but graphically records the workings of an abattoir. A decade later, Franju would make the fiction feature *Eyes Without a Face*, in which a surgeon attempts to graft a new face on to his disfigured daughter (a concept lifted and adapted by Pedro Almodóvar in 2011's *The Skin I Live In*). Skinning, sexual trauma and the effort to escape gender reunited to controversial effect in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), in which transsexual serial killer Jame Gumb is hell-bent on creating a woman-suit out of actual womankind.

*The Silence of the Lambs* affronted some activists who regarded it as a pathologisation of transsexualism. Certainly Gumb's deranged ploy – like Elvira's helplessly masculine silhouette, Hedwig's inch or the fluttery excesses of *Little Britain's* less-than-convincing ‘lady’ Emily Howard – allows the interpretation that gender change produces monsters. In *The Skin I Live In*, as in *Death Becomes Her* (1992), it's cosmetic plastic surgery that signals encroaching madness, both individual and social. Is the creepiness and sadness of these stories religious in character? Do they warn that interference with God's plan for




**'Hedwig and the Angry Inch'**





*Titles such as 'The Silence of the Lambs' allow the interpretation that gender change produces monsters*

our bodies/faces ushers in moral chaos? The slaughterhouse is a fitting place to frame the question, for there we either fly in the face of God by systematically murdering his creatures, or do his bidding by making full use of the bounty with which he has provided us. Either way, most of us tend to prefer to stay out of the room where it all happens.

Cruelty to animals onscreen notoriously tends to shock audiences more profoundly than human-on-human violence; certainly it's a sure-fire way to spook the censor. This is partly because disbelief gets unsuspended fast if an animal appears to be suffering for real, as opposed to an actor feigning; but it's also related to collective repression of the realities of the meat industry (most of those who flinch at witnessing cruelty onscreen aren't nearly so sensitive come dinnertime). Elvira, in spite of her affected "I'm a lady!" delicacy, forces us to watch the bloody reality – and reminds us that while gender, nationhood, historical memory and romantic partnership can all be peeled off, the mess left behind isn't easily sluiced away. 

BE NATIONAL ARCHIVE (6), KOBAL COLLECTION (1)

THE FIVE BEST...

## ANTHONY ASQUITH FILMS

The English director, whose 1927 *Underground* is rereleased this month, has long been underrated, but take a look at these...



**By Michael Brooke**  
Anthony 'Puffin' Asquith (left, 1902-68) had the bluest blood imaginable, yet he was an ardent socialist who wore a boiler suit on set.

A visual virtuoso in the silent era, he then became unfairly pigeonholed as a conservative plodder, but a look at the BFI's recent restoration of his London-set 1927 film *Underground* (rereleased in UK cinemas on 11 January) or any of these five features will give the lie to the caricature.



### 1 *A Cottage on Dartmoor* (1929)

Britain's most cinematically accomplished silent film (at this stage, Asquith was arguably ahead of Hitchcock), this riveting tale of thwarted love and attempted revenge uses ultra-rapid cutting to underscore the psychological turmoil of a man brought down by uncontrollable emotions.



### 2 *Pygmalion* (1938)

After an early-1930s decline, Asquith's career bounced back with this adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's hardy perennial. Shaw himself recommended comparative newcomer Wendy Hiller as Eliza Doolittle, who proved more than a match for Leslie Howard's Professor Higgins.



### 3 *The Way to the Stars* (1945)

This understated study of the relationship between British and American pilots between 1940 and 1944 was an early entry in the long collaboration between Asquith and playwright Terence Rattigan, whose (rare) original screenplay drew on his own RAF experience.



### 4 *The Browning Version* (1951)

Rattigan's one-act play about a classics schoolmaster in severe personal, professional and emotional decline must have looked hugely unpromising as film material. But with a career-best performance from Michael Redgrave, the result is almost unbearably moving.

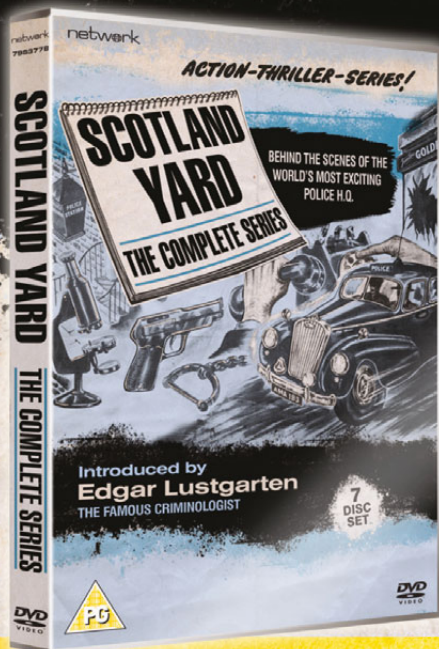


### 5 *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952)

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Asquith all but stages Oscar Wilde's evergreen comedy under a proscenium arch, but its calculatedly arch dialogue rarely saw a better fit – and Edith Evans's battle-axe Lady Bracknell was already a finely honed theatrical legend.



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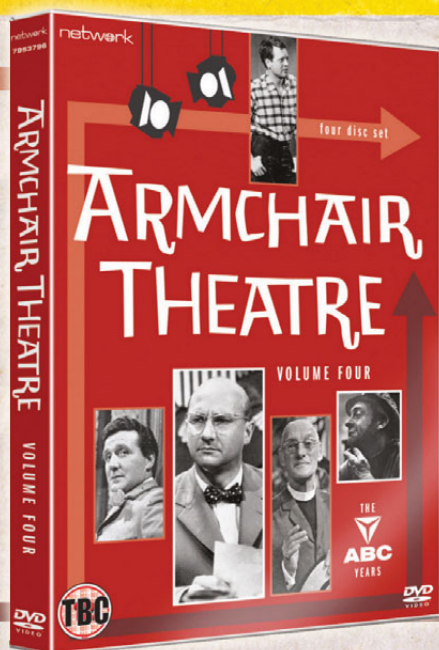


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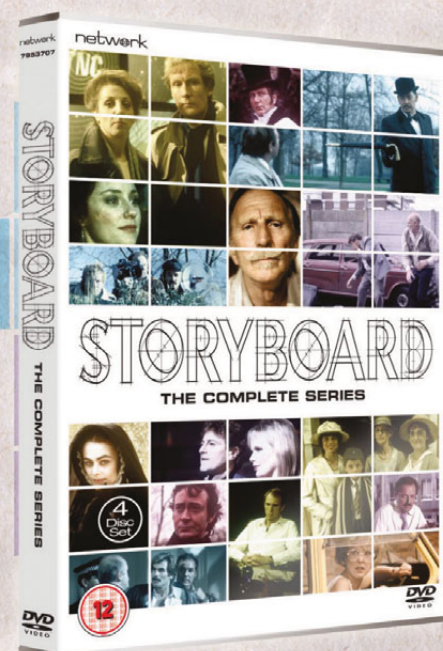
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# UNDER THE SKIN

Jen and Sylvia Soska's darkly satirical *American Mary* is one of the most striking and original horror movies in years

**By Anton Bitel**

Inspired by Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's *Grindhouse* (2007), Canadian identical twins Jen and Sylvia Soska (aka Twisted Twins Productions) wrote, directed, produced and starred in the spectacularly titled faux trailer *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*, which in 2009 they turned into a no-budget exploitation feature debut of the same name. In their second feature, the dark satire *American Mary*, ambitious young surgeon Mary Mason (Katharine Isabelle) struggles to achieve success in mainstream medicine but thrives catering to the underground 'body modification' community, becoming solvent, empowered and self-determined while operating way off the grid. The movie surgically modifies the norms of the American dream while letting the ugly sutures show, and is one of the most inventive genre films of the last decade.

**Anton Bitel: 'American Mary' represents a huge advance on your first feature in terms of its production values. How did you secure financing for a film whose plot – stitched together from elements of rape-revenge, body horror and tragic romance – practically defines niche?**

**Sylvia Soska:** Everybody passed on the movie. We were trying to sell it for about a year and a half, to the point where we actually thought, "Nobody believes we can pull off a movie like this. Nobody understands the niche." We are so tired of seeing the same movie in the horror genre being made over and over again, so we wanted to make something different and I think, with the content of *American Mary*, we overshot that ambition by a lot. My parents mortgaged their house and became the first investors into it. After that we had two other investors, 430 Productions and Riaz Tyab, come on board, and the people that we did get coming in to finance the film really understood what we were trying to do. They didn't see a *Hostel* or a *Saw* film but this very odd commentary on a woman's role in a male-dominated workplace and an emphasis on what people are actually like despite their outward appearance.

**Jen Soska:** Absolutely. It was such a unique project that nobody wanted to touch it. That's in itself the reason why we really wanted to make this film, because there aren't a lot of groups that are as misunderstood as the people in the body-modification community. The knee-jerk reaction is to think these people are freaks, but I don't really see a difference between them and people that indulge in cosmetic surgery; except with cosmetic surgery, often people are trying to fit into the ideal, or the American ideal, of what is beautiful – not necessarily doing it for themselves, but doing it for other people – whereas in the body-mod community, you can't really argue that somebody is filing their teeth or forking their tongue to please anybody but themselves.



Twisted twins: Jen and Sylvia Soska

*There aren't a lot of groups that are as misunderstood as the people in the body-modification community*

It was very difficult – it got to the point where we were thinking that maybe in ten years, after we'd made a few films, we'd be able to do *American Mary*, when people had enough faith in us. After they'd seen *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*, some people locked us into a category of grindhouse shock filmmakers that can only do something like that, but our fanbase was so loyal and believed in us, and so many reviewers as well said, "Give these girls a little more money and you're really going to be able to see something."



Surgical spirit: Katharine Isabelle as Mary Mason

**AB: Is Mary's professional experience of mainstream frustration followed by niche success an allegory of your own experience as female, non-US indie horror filmmakers?**

**SS:** It is absolutely an analogy for our own experiences. When we wrote the script, we were still in the process of distributing *Dead Hooker in a Trunk* and had spent all of our money. The film itself cost only \$2500 but we couldn't afford food and we had bill collectors calling us all the time. We'd be going down to LA and having meetings with different industry types – these very clean-cut people who you'd think would be very normal and professional – but a lot of the time Jennifer and I were being treated as party favours rather than working women in the industry with product that we were trying to put out. Being identical twins, we always found ourselves a little outcast and people would always judge us by the way we looked. As we had initially given ourselves only two weeks to write the script, I don't think we even realised we put everything of ourselves into it. It was very therapeutic. If I hadn't written that script at that time with Jen, I don't know what I would have done because we had ailing family members, we had debts, we had such an ambition of what we were going to be without knowing what we were going to end up actually being. It felt like there were a lot of sacrifices we had to make to get there while still trying to be true as the artists that we were.

**JS:** It's the same with Canadian talent. Katharine Isabelle is a phenomenal talent and she's a horror icon and a very pretty girl, but she's hit that Canadian glass ceiling where you don't see her being cast in LA films or Hollywood big-studio films because they look at her and they say she's not a name, regardless of what her talent is. Although I think that's changing a lot after her performance in *American Mary*. 📌

**i** **'American Mary' is released in the UK on 11 January, and is reviewed on page 88**



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# CLOSE TO YOU

Michael Haneke's *Amour* is as much a film about the intimate and private space of the couple's home as it is about loss and dying



**By Mark Cousins**

I finally saw Haneke's *Amour* recently.

As soon as the film started, I could see that its imagery is very Haneke – crisply photographed (by Darius Khondji), with none of the romanticism, burnish or distortions of Alexander Sokurov's similarly themed *Mother and Son*. Nor is it in any way a melodrama; it isn't about the terms of endearment. As well as being about dying and loss, the film is, like many Haneke pictures, about control. The husband is tetchy with incomers into the world of his dying wife. "I was with her all her life," he seemed to say, "and so I own her dying."

This is what makes the film distinctive, I thought: it's a study in power rather than poetics. But then I went to bed. When I woke up, my flat in Edinburgh, where I've lived for 14 years, felt different. I realised that a key element in *Amour* is the couple's apartment. Like Polanski's *The Tenant* or Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*, *Amour* could have been called *The Apartment*. It starts with the main door being broken open. The door's like a border post in the film, featuring regularly. *Amour* is full of incursions into the space by the couple's daughter, son-in-law, former piano student, nurses and, more mysteriously, a pigeon. Each of these incursions feels like a transgression. Almost all of the tension in the film comes from such trespassing from the outside world of the living on the inside one of the dying. Only at the end of the film do we see wide shots that

reveal the apartment's layout. Before that it has been less clear, more the sort of space that Gaston Bachelard writes about, where corners, cushions, corridors create atmospheres.

As I walked around my apartment the day after seeing Haneke's (which is a recreation of his parents' one in Vienna), I realised that the resonance it carries in the film comes from the fact that it is not only a space but a territory. In Revolutionary France, a territory was not only a space, it was a space plus the rules which operate within that space. The rules activated the space, made it sacred or at least lawful. What's so moving about *Amour* for me is that its territory has its own atmosphere, sounds, emotions, language, eating habits, memories, losses and, most of all, rules of engagement or, rather, slow dis-engagement.

This idea of territory reminds us that Haneke's movie forefather is Roman Polanski. It's not only *The Tenant* that is about spaces with rules. *Knife in the Water*'s boat is a territory with exacting regulations about power and eros. *Cul-de-sac*'s castle is just such a territory but on dry land. *Death and the Maiden* is the same, but even more so. The rules become explicit and abusive. *Bitter Moon* is territory as farce. And by the time we get to *Rosemary's Baby*, it's hard to avoid the idea that such territories are torture chambers, places where the rules are used to hurt.

To say this further strengthens the link between Polanski and Haneke, of course. *Funny Games*, *The Piano Teacher* and *Hidden* are all torture chambers, all territories in which hate or love are autocratic powers in houses and apartments; judiciaries laying down the law of the land. And lest we think that this could be said about all films set in confined spaces, consider movies like *Rio Bravo* and the work of Ozu Yasujiro. *Rio Bravo* is an apartment film but not a territory film. The guys in the prison house are easy on each other. Despite this film being a western about lawmen, it



Homemaker: Roman Polanski in 'The Tenant'

isn't really about the law or confinement or claustrophobia. It's about camaraderie and friendship, not control. And nor are Ozu's films about territories, control or bondage. Despite the fact that many are set in family homes, those homes feel balanced, not strained. They're relatively empty of rules; calm, not full of the static electricity of human beings controlling each other and suffering.

To say these things is to notice the assonance between territory and terror, but there's another rhyme worth considering, the French vinicultural word *terroir*. Just as the weather, soil and farming methods of a vineyard help create the wine, so *Amour*'s *terroir* gives it its flavour and creates its melancholias and moods, its sharpness and sweetness.

One thing the French revolutionaries knew is that territory is about sovereignty. So is *Amour*, I think. The wife is assertive but, as her body dies, the husband becomes sovereign. And what do we in the film world call sovereignty? We call it authorship. The man in *Amour* is the author of his wife's dying, and many of the events that lead up to (or down to) it too. In a way, he's the filmmaker, shuffling around, creating rules and controlling events in a studio space.

This column is supposed to be reports from places I've been. *Amour* is an unforgettable place I've been. 📍

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH SERGIO LEONE

"Up to a certain time, westerns were more like children's games, with people dying by falling forward – instead of being propelled backward. The lead bullet would enter like this and stay there without leaving a mark. I feel that *A Fistful of Dollars* made a certain breakthrough in terms of the presentation of violence and ushered in the kind of realism that can now be used."

From a 1982 interview printed in Christopher Frayling's book 'Once upon a Time in Italy'





DEVELOPMENT TALE

## BREAKING THE JOURNEY



Travelling companions: the casting of Tim Roth, right, in *'The Liability'* helped attract other talent to the project, including up-and-comer Jack O'Connell, left

A chance meeting outside a nursery school helped speed Tim Roth thriller *The Liability* on its path to the screen

**By Charles Gant**

Some films come together quickly. For others it can be an endless slog of development blockage and false turns. What's unusual about low-budget British thriller *The Liability* is that its journey has been both a marathon and a sprint, a perfect emblem of all the challenges and serendipities that impede and nourish UK filmmaking. Having begun 15 years ago as a showcase for the screenwriting talents of film critic (and *S&S* regular) John Wrathall, the hitman tale found itself banished by its author to a drawer, and there it remained until a chance meeting many years later gave it a second chance at life. Within a matter of months, cameras were rolling in wintry Northumberland, with an impressive cast comprising Tim Roth, Jack O'Connell, Peter Mullan, Talulah Riley and Kierston Wareing.

"In the 1990s I was a freelance film reviewer," Wrathall recalls, "and I'd seen enough crap

movies to think, 'God, I could have a go at doing something better than that.' But I knew enough about the film industry to know that if you were going to cold-call as a screenwriter, there was no point writing some precious art movie. So I wrote this script which had a hitman and a serial killer, and it all ended up at a rave, which I think was the default setting for first-time screenplays written in the 90s. Looking back, I don't think it was a great script, but it was eye-catching enough to get me meetings, and it was one of two spec scripts that helped me get me an agent.

"Then when *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* came out [in 1998], there was that awful glut of low-budget geezer movies, and suddenly a low-budget thriller about a hitman, which had seemed quite a smart move a year earlier, was the last thing anybody wanted." Wrathall turned instead to the historical-drama genre, although his adaptation of the C.P. Taylor play *Good*, starring Viggo Mortensen, hit its fair share of speed bumps on its way to its 2009 cinema release. "Then after the credit crunch," he continues, "suddenly the film industry had gone full circle to where we were in the 90s, and everybody was saying, 'We want to make films for £1 million.' Low-budget, punchy stuff."

The change in environment, combined with the arrival of a few decent low-budget British thrillers such as *London to Brighton* and *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*, sent Wrathall's thoughts spiralling back to his first screenplay. But what really kickstarted its revival was a chance meeting in December 2010 with producer Richard Johns, when both men were dropping off their three-year-old sons at a Suffolk village nursery school. "Obviously I run into producers in London, and you don't meet someone on a street corner and instantly say, 'Hey, we've got to work together,'" Wrathall comments. "But somehow the sheer unlikelihood of us bumping into each other there sparked our interest in collaborating. You meet producers who say they're producers, but don't actually produce films. What was encouraging was that Richard was actually producing a film right then, *Truth or Dare*, about a youth house party that goes horribly wrong."

Johns – whose producer credits span a dozen features over 15 years, including the Oscar-nominated *Shadow of the Vampire* – had started his career in the North-East, where he had a company with director Bharat Nalluri (who went on to TV acclaim with the likes of *Spooks* and *Hustle*). He still had good



connections with the region, including specific interest from investor North Star to make a low-budget genre film. Handily, *The Liability* was already largely set in the North-East.

While retaining the basic premise and main characters, the writer started again from scratch. "I didn't even read the original because, having progressed as a writer, there's something depressing about going back to old work," Wrathall recalls. "I used the theory that anything I remembered about it would be stuff potentially worth keeping. When I'd written it before as a less experienced writer, what I'd done to spice it up was to have them keep meeting more people on the road. This time around, I knew the whole discipline was to make a movie with few settings and characters, so I tried to make that a virtue."

Wrathall and Johns – working with Rupert Jermyn, his producing partner at Corona

*The shoot was in December in the North-East, with very little daylight. Getting it in the can was really miraculous*

Pictures – opted not to seek development funding for the script, knowing that this would massively slow the process down, and that the bigger prize of production money could be available if they had a camera-ready screenplay to shoot later that year. The first draft was delivered in April 2011, and the second in June. In July, director Craig Viveiros (*Ghosted*) was attached, and a month later the production had snagged both Tim Roth and Peter Mullan, who share an agent at Markham, Froggatt & Irwin. Roth was free to pursue more film roles after a three-season stint on Fox TV show *Lie to Me*, and was coming to the UK to shoot theatre director Rufus Norris's debut feature *Broken*. *The Liability*, with its compressed four-week shoot, could be tacked neatly on to the end. But, as Wrathall points out, the shoot "was in November and December in the North-East, with very little daylight, short days and constant threat of snow. Getting it in the can was really miraculous."

Although the film's financing was not particularly cast-dependent – and Johns and Jermyn were able to make their previous feature *Truth or Dare* without equivalently recognisable names – the starry package helped when it came to bringing *The Liability* to the market, with sales so far to the UK, US, Germany, Japan and Australia/New Zealand. Roth is rewarded with an executive-producer credit on the film, joining a long list of private investors who are similarly honoured.

"Tim was really the linchpin piece of casting," says producer Johns. "Once we had strong interest from him, we were then able to go out to the talent marketplace and it made it a lot easier to get great actors for the other parts. Tim knows how important he was to us creatively, and also in a business sense in pulling everything together." 📌

**i** **'The Liability' is released in the UK on 25 January, and is reviewed on page 100**

## THE NUMBERS 2012 IN REVIEW

**By Charles Gant**

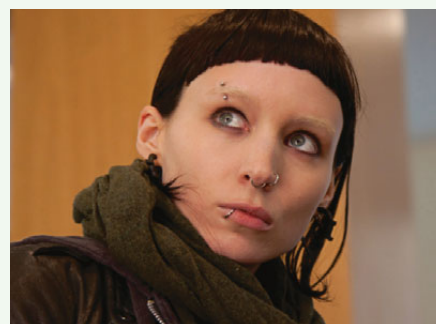
**After a year in which just one foreign language film cracked £1 million at the UK box office – only Pedro Almodóvar's 'The Skin I Live In' cleared the hurdle in 2011 – foreign tongues bounced back in 2012, with three pictures making it into seven figures. However, arthouse cinemas aren't necessarily rejoicing, since two of the trio are multiplex-skewing genre titles (Nordic thriller 'Headhunters' and Jakarta martial-arts actioner 'The Raid') and the third is a defiantly mainstream slice of feelgood buddy-movie uplift, 'Untouchable'. For classic auteurist dramas, you have to look to the likes of 'Rust and Bone' (£815,000) and 'Amour' (£544,000). Although at press time both are still on release, it's fair to say that the Audiard has little hope of catching its predecessor 'A Prophet' (£1.3 million), while the Haneke may well fall short of 'The White Ribbon' (£647,000).**

Foreign hits were thin on the ground in 2012, and there's a notable dominance of French, the language spoken in 'Rust and Bone', 'Amour', 'The Kid with a Bike', 'Le Havre', 'Delicacy' and, just outside the top ten, 'Holy Motors' (£242,000). 'Amour', hardly an easy sell, might have been tougher with a geriatric couple in, say, Berlin, speaking German. 'Le Havre', the second French-set film from Aki Kaurismäki (following 1992's 'La Vie de Bohème'), proved to be significantly more popular than all his Finnish pictures. And 'The Kid with a Bike' would have lacked recognisable names Cécile de France and Jérémie Renier had it been set among Belgium's Flemish speakers.

There's inevitably something of an arbitrary aspect to our chart of the year's English-language hits, not least the inclusion of the almost wholly silent but US-set 'The Artist'. Not reflected in our auteur-inflected chart is the triumph this year of cosy middlebrow cinema, with John Madden's 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel' leading the charge with £20.3 million. A similar Middle England audience embraced Steven Spielberg's 'War Horse'



**'Untouchable'**



**'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo'**

(£18.6 million), Phyllida Lloyd's 'The Iron Lady' (£9.9 million) and Lasse Hallström's 'Salmon Fishing in the Yemen' (£6.0 million). It's perhaps surprising to see the latter little-heralded title, adapted by Simon Beaufoy from the Paul Torday novel, gross more than Joe Wright's starry take on 'Anna Karenina'.

In documentary, there is nothing to match 2011 winner 'Senna' (£3.2 million), with Bart Layton's 'The Imposter' (£1.1 million) edging out Kevin Macdonald's 'Marley' (£991,000). In 2011, two foreign-language docs – 'Pina' and 'Cave of Forgotten Dreams' – cleared £600,000. This time around, top title in this category is Patricio Guzmán's poetic exploration, 'Nostalgia for the Light' (£145,000). 📌

### FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FILMS AT UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE, 2012

Film	Gross
Untouchable	£1,993,886*
Headhunters	£1,502,245
The Raid	£1,085,875
Rust and Bone	£815,604*
Amour	£544,492*
A Royal Affair	£374,160
The Kid with a Bike	£370,518
Le Havre	£358,831
Once upon a Time in Anatolia	£277,447
Delicacy	£276,266

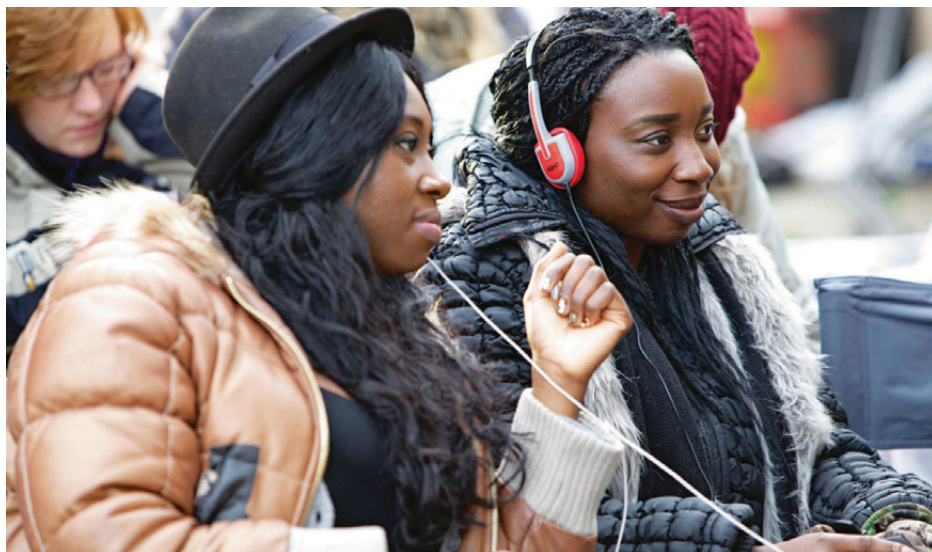
Grosses to 16 Dec 2012; \*still on release; foreign-language chart excludes Bollywood films

### ENGLISH-LANGUAGE AUTEUR TITLES AT UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE, 2012

Film	Gross
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	£12,286,614
The Artist	£9,794,256
Magic Mike	£8,296,165
The Descendants	£8,223,361
Anna Karenina	£5,625,761*
Silver Linings Playbook	£4,104,067*
Killing Them Softly	£2,747,921*
Haywire	£2,340,171
Moonrise Kingdom	£2,054,366
Shame	£2,036,092



## PECKHAM WRY



"Just like twins": writer Bola Agbaje and director Destiny Ekaragha on the set of 'Gone Too Far'

Films about black characters in inner cities don't have to include drugs or violence, as *Gone Too Far* demonstrates

By Ashley Clarke

It's a drizzly mid-November morning and nearly two dozen cast and crew members are wedged into a narrow alley deep in the concrete heart of East London's Bethnal Green. Today the district is doubling for South-East London counterpart Peckham and it's the final day's shooting on *Gone Too Far*, a new comedy about a manic day in the lives of two newly met brothers (one Nigerian, one British). A big-screen adaptation of Bola Agbaje's award-winning play, it's one of the first films to receive production money from the new BFI Film Fund.

Producer Christopher Granier-Deferre of Poisson Rouge Pictures (co-producing with the BFI) first saw the play in 2008 at London's Royal Court Theatre and immediately grasped its potential for screen adaptation: "It represented a great opportunity to portray a vibrant group in a way that's not been done before." Working alongside Bradley Quirk of the now-defunct UK Film Council, Granier-Deferre approached Agbaje with the idea of developing it as a feature. After a period of script work, director Destiny Ekaragha came on board in 2010; both Agbaje and Ekaragha are Nigerian Brits and Granier-Deferre describes them as having "clicked, just like twins".

Funding was initially elusive; Ekaragha puts this down to potential investors' inability to fit the film into a box. "It wasn't the [film's] structure that was holding us back. It was certain companies not getting it and saying:

*What I'd love is if a girl sees me in a magazine and it's a normal thing in her world for there to be a black female director*

"There's no audience for this.' Any film with young black boys in it is called 'urban.'" Though gritty themes are broached in *Gone Too Far*, neither drugs nor violence provide the backdrop, separating it from the recent trend of crime-fixated youth fare (think *Kidulthood* or *Shank*). All involved stress the film's universality and basis in comedy; both Agbaje and Ekaragha cite John Hughes's *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* as an influence.

In the period of transition following the UKFC's dissolution, Granier-Deferre took the film on the road, including a spell at Film London's Microwave programme. Ekaragha shot an eight-minute pilot, but it didn't work out ("We had so many young actors, it looked like it was for Nickelodeon!"). The breakthrough came with a Royal Court reading in July 2012 in front of key executives. "It was registering with people and saying something about being from different communities in any city," says Granier-Deferre. Soon after, *Gone Too Far* received BFI funding of £35,000 for further development, and £357,000 for production. (The entire budget clocks in at under £1 million.)

Shooting began in October 2012, Peckham proving the most popular location for the crew. Peckham native Agbaje describes the local community as "urgent, vibrant and welcoming". A key cast member caught chickenpox mid-shoot, forcing a recasting, but this proved to be the most stressful moment in an otherwise fairly serene shoot.

There's another intriguing story here: in directing *Gone Too Far*, Ekaragha becomes only the third female black British feature film director, following Ngozi Onwurah (*Welcome II the Terrordome*) and Amma Asante (*A Way of Life*). Visibly surprised by the observation, she says: "What I'd really love is if a little girl of ten or 11 sees me in a magazine and it's normal in her world for there to be a black female director – that would be amazing!" Then she departs to set up the shoot's final scene. Clearly, whatever the end result, *Gone Too Far* has the potential to represent a hugely promising step in a new direction for British cinema. **S**

## IN PRODUCTION

● **Jane Goldman**, screenwriter of 'Kick-Ass' and 'Woman in Black' (and Jonathan Ross's better half) is adapting Peter Ackroyd's 1994 Victorian London novel 'Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem' for the screen. Reports have also linked Goldman with Tim Burton's upcoming live-action 'Pinocchio', though Burton is apparently yet to commit to the project.

● **Lucrecia Martel**, below, is finally to follow her 2008 film 'The Headless Woman' with 'Zama', a story set in Paraguay and Argentina in the 17th century, adapted from a book by Argentine journalist Antonio di Benedetto.

● **Sean Durkin**, director of 'Martha Marcy May Marlene', has been working in UK television with screenwriter Tony Grisoni on 'Southcliffe', a four-part film for Channel 4 about the aftermath of a shooting incident in an English town.

● **Hou Hsiao-Hsien** has begun shooting his long-awaited martial-arts film 'The Assassin', after years of production problems and budgetary wrangles. The film follows a young woman who is trained in martial arts by a Taoist nun, only to then be ordered to kill a close friend. Hou is again working with his regular DP Mark Lee Ping Bin.

● **Andrew Dominik**, the Australian director of 'The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford' and last year's 'Killing Them Softly', is reportedly to make a Marilyn Monroe biopic based on Joyce Carol Oates's novel 'Blonde'.

● **Christian Petzold** has announced that he plans to follow last year's 'Barbara', which became a surprising success at the UK box office, with a story set in the immediate aftermath of WWII. Petzold told *Indiewire*: "It will be in Berlin, 1945, in which a survivor of Auschwitz is returning to get her life back." Petzold's regular star Nina Hoss is lined up to star in the as-yet-untitled project.

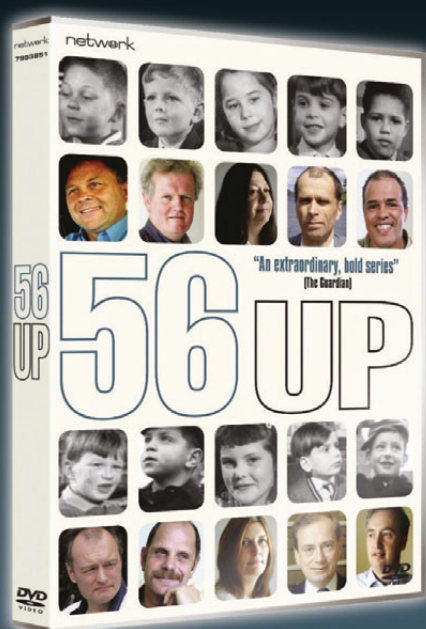
● **Wally Pfister**, perhaps best known for being the DP on Christopher Nolan's films, is to make his directorial debut with 'Transcendence', a sci-fi project that will reportedly feature Johnny Depp in the lead role. Actors in the running to play alongside Depp include Rooney Mara, Emily Blunt, Christian Bale and Rebecca Hall.





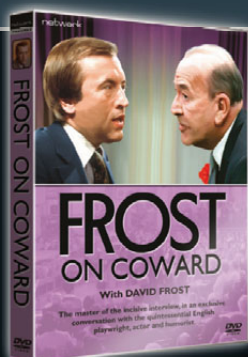
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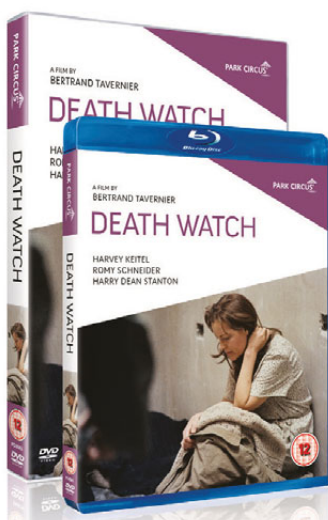
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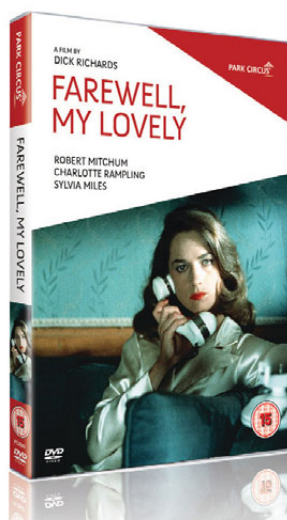
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## NEW RELEASES

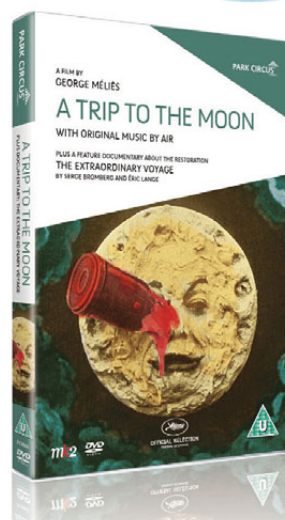
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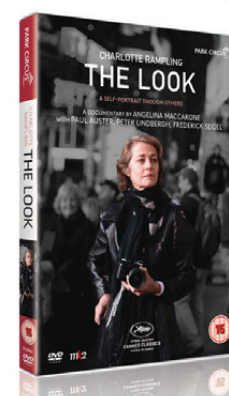
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## CATHERINE MTSITOURIDZE

Previously mired in Soviet red tape, international sales of films from Russia are now in the hands of a former art-history professor

By Nick Roddick

In the summer of 1975, veteran Hollywood director George Cukor arrived in what was then Leningrad to make his ill-fated movie version of *The Blue Bird*, the first (and quite possibly the only) US-Soviet co-production. Legend has it that he was taken on a tour of the Lenfilm Studios, with all the staff dutifully lined up to greet him. "On this very stage," the tour guide is reported to have boasted, "the great masters of Soviet cinema made their first films in the 1920s." "Yes," a voice called out from somewhere up above, "and using the same equipment, too."

Maintaining its cinematic heritage was always a problem for the Soviet Union. Preserving the films themselves was a priority but the other bits of the process were often neglected. When I visited Mosfilm in 1989, it looked more like a rest home for elderly vehicles than a working film studio. Similarly, the state film-promotion agency, Sovexportfilm, was a regular sight at film festivals but its representatives spent more time booking restaurants than promoting films.

Bizarrely, the company responsible for selling films made in Russia was still called Sovexportfilm until as recently as 2010, 19 years after the state had ceased to be 'Soviet'. In the past two years, however, the pace has picked up sharply and the business of presenting Russian films to the world has been wrenched determinedly into the 21st century under the stewardship of Catherine Mtsitouridze, a former art-history professor from Tbilisi. The old name and logos have been dropped and the new agency, Roskino, has become a significant presence at the festivals and markets where the international film industry does business.

These are hard times for the Russian film industry. In November, Lenfilm had to be rescued from bankruptcy with a RUB1.5 billion (£30 million) loan from the government; and government support for film production is very much in Prime Minister Medvedev's sights. He recently warned that, if the Russian industry's market share drops below 18 per cent, the current support system will be abolished. Since the market share in 2011 was 16 per cent (down from 27.6 per cent in 2007), this is a lot more than an idle threat.

Mtsitouridze, meanwhile, has pushed ahead with a series of moves designed to raise the profile of Russian films internationally, ranging from a proper pavilion at Cannes and a big stand at the first-ever Venice Film Market this summer to a recent deal with US content aggregator Gravititas Ventures to make a dozen contemporary Russian films available on the US VOD site Hulu.

This certainly looks like progress. But, says Mtsitouridze, "money is still very tight and we definitely need to have more staff because we are all exhausted. We live



Representing Russia: Catherine Mtsitouridze at Cannes in 2008

*We need to change people's opinion – to make Russian cinema fashionable the way Romanian films are fashionable*

in the office! We start work at 11 o'clock every day, including Sundays, and we work until 2 o'clock at night. No holidays!"

Some of this has to do with the fact that Roskino operates under a curious – and hopefully temporary – structure: it is officially part of the Ministry of Culture but is largely funded by private sponsors, which include energy giant Gazprom, national airline Aeroflot and Sberbank, the largest financial institution in Russia and Eastern Europe. "It's a really complicated structure," Mtsitouridze admits. "We are a commercial organisation but at the same time we're 100 per cent government and that causes us a lot of difficulties. The government does not support us at the festivals, unlike Unifrance for example. Everything happens because I involve a lot of commercial partners."

This state of affairs, she says, has proved necessary because, two decades after the collapse of the USSR, Russia is still in transition: "Everything is changing. It has all had to be created again. It's a different country but we still have the same status like it was in the Soviet Union."

Mtsitouridze is currently trying to develop co-production schemes with a number of countries, including Britain, but admits that these things take time – about three years with the current Russian ministerial bureaucracy back in Moscow, she says. Without them, however, real progress is not possible. "It

involves everything," she explains, "from tax schemes and government support to visas – because it's totally crazy to get a British visa. They are now the most complicated in the world! You can get an American visa in a few days; you don't even have to go to the embassy. But for a British one, you have to wait two or three weeks." In *The Fog* director Sergei Loznitsa, for instance, was a no-show at the London Film Festival purely because he couldn't get a visa in time.

It is, of course, Mtsitouridze's job to be upbeat about Russian films and there can be no denying that their profile has increased since Roskino came on the scene two years ago: the Hulu deal, in particular – which will involve an initial package of 12 films, including Venice Silver Lion-winner *Paper Soldier* and Russian Oscar selection *The Edge* – "marks the first time ever that a fine selection of Russian films will be available to a wider US audience".

Mtsitouridze is sanguine about the fact that the Russian industry has massive problems to overcome, including the fact that Russia is the only major market not to have electronic ticketing; according to her, this is blocked by exhibitors, who have a lot to gain from the current non-transparent set-up.

But contemporary Russian cinema is on a growth curve, she insists: "I think the 1990s was really the darkest period. It's still tough: we need a system change. It's not a free market because there are rules and regulations which we have from the past that are still in place. But we're really trying to change the attitudes of the young generation and give them the belief that they can change everything. And we need to change people's opinion around the world about what is going on in Russia – to make Russian cinema fashionable, like Romanian films are fashionable." 📞



MORELIA

## A COLLECTIVE EMBRACE



Heartbreaking: 'El Norte,' Gregory Nava's 1983 milestone film about the plight of Central Americans in the US

It's trimmed back the luxury – a bit – but this Mexican fest retains its uniquely pleasing balance of the social and the cinephile

**By Nick James**

On the night of the Day of the Dead, a ferryboat chugs across the inky expanse of Lake Pátzcuaro. On board are such cinema luminaries as Abbas Kiarostami, Sally Potter and Cannes boss Thierry Frémaux. Guests of the Morelia Film Festival for its tenth anniversary edition, we've just been ushered away from a shoreside restaurant for an all-night tour. Over the decade, Morelia has earned the reputation of being the most hospitable festival there is. Tonight, it's given itself an especially intricate task: to take more than 70 guests to cemeteries dotted about the lake and its islands. To make matters

tougher, members of the European contingent are all jet-lagged to ga-ga (myself included), having flown into Mexico City the night before and been travelling much of the day – albeit in luxurious style on a specially appointed Pullman train, the Kansas City Southern.

Dark clumps of vegetation pass on either side. I wonder if they're garlands of the marigolds we've been seeing all day – the flower used to decorate the graves of the dead – but it turns out they're water lilies. Dressed in orange life-jackets under harsh light, everyone looks pale and dazed. At first we seem to be heading for the pudding-shaped Island of Janitzo – brightly lit and surmounted by a giant statue of revolutionary priest José María Morelos – but then we pass it by. As the shoreline looms, the lilies mass around us. The boatman cuts his speed. A light flashes up ahead and we glimpse a man wearing a silver baseball cap and paddling a white canoe – an apparition from a

Peter Doig painting. He seems to be guiding us. It's a moment reminiscent of so many movie scenes where boats edge into darkness. And since this is Mexico, we can be forgiven for indulging our over-stimulated imaginations.

What greet us at the jetty, however, are children dancing – not for us, but for their families and friends. Soon we're walking to the summit of a hill. The place is Arócutin; the church is boatlike, narrow at the bottom, wider at the ceiling, and the cemetery seems like an emptying out of the church's insides, as marigolds, candlelight and incense smoke make everything orange. The graves are heaped with flower frames; they seem to float in pools of thick bright candles. The Purepecha people sit and stand among the graves, some in blankets and ponchos, the men wearing cream or white Stetsons, the children, in some cases, bedding down for the night. There are nearly as many onlookers as participants, but it does



not spoil the mood, which is one neither of joy nor sadness but rather a collective embrace of memory. Jet-lag vanishes – we're seeing something no other film festival can provide.

I've recalled that Arócutin trip here to show you what a tough act the Morelia festival sets itself to follow. I was there on the Mexican Feature Film jury, alongside UK producer Lynda Miles (*The Commitments*, *The Van* and *The Snapper*) and Argentine director Lisandro Alonso (*Freedom*, *Los muertos*, *Fantasma* and *Liverpool*). I'd been to Morelia once before, seven years back, and what impressed me then was its commitment to being a hub for all the ferment of small-scale cinema going on in Central America. It was also a well-sponsored festival; that trip remains the only time in my life I've seen two separate helicopters land on a lawn. Sensibly, Morelia has reined in some of its extravagance (though not enough to hurt) and they've developed their programme into a juicier feast of cinematic delights of all varieties.

Though jury duties, and other pressing events, prevented me from sampling as much of the issue-driven doc and short-fiction material, it remains Morelia's bedrock, and the few programmes I took in at random were fascinating enough. The combination, for instance, of Gastón Atrade Juárez's short *The Tree* – where we see the felling and eventual use for traditional reasons of an enormous tree trunk – with Pedro González Rubio's Japanese-set documentary *Inori*, which portrays the lives of people left behind in a mountain village, was a perfect match. The fatalism that underwrites Joaquín del Paso and Jan Paweł Trzaska's documentary *Dream of San Juan*, in which landlides threaten the continued existence of Mixteco people in Sierra Madre, was packaged aptly with Bruno Varela's experimental vanished-person doc *Estela* and an inventively shot short *Paal* which followed Memo, a Mayan kid anxious to document his daily life.

We began our Mexican feature duties the day after the opening night film, Pablo Larraín's excellent *No*. Though it was not a vintage year, two films of the nine we watched stood out – and for very different reasons. We gave the prize to Natalia Beristain's *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (*No quiero dormir sola*), in which 33-year-old Amanda (Mariana Gaja) drifts between jobs and lovers until she discovers that her paternal grandmother Dolores (telenovela, movie and stage star Adriana Roel) – a once-famous actress she's never been close to – is living in squalor as an alcoholic with early-stage Alzheimer's disease. How the blossoming relationship between them will pan out isn't in doubt, though there's reluctance on both sides, Amanda's actor father being (most of the time) a provocatively negligent absence. By helping Dolores as she begins to lose herself, however, Amanda firms up her own determination. It's an interior film, with strong performances from Gaja and Roel, that brims with images of self-regard yet develops a dialogue that eventually dissolves Amanda's insularity.

*Halley*, on the other hand – directed by gallery artist Sebastián Hofman and just selected for the Tiger competition in Rotterdam

## *Morelia is a hub for all the ferment of small-scale cinema going on in Central America and much else besides*

– relies entirely on disgust for its impact. Alberto (Alberto Trujillo), the security guard at a gym, is suffering from an undisclosed disease that causes his body to constantly decompose. The film is very precise in depicting the nauseating details of this corruption, which Alberto deals with stoically, if with understandable misery. That Lily (Lourdes Trueba), his female boss at the gym, takes a fancy to him, is, of course, an opportunity for poignancy as well as black humour, though for me there's not enough of either to make it feel worthwhile at feature length.

In general, the Mexican features were prey to unfortunate tendencies: too much self-indulgent subject-matter involving the comfortably well-off and what we might call a *National Geographic* approach to cinematography – making everything look too perfect. There was a deal of other stimulation in which to find recompense, however. A screening of *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* was more moving and elegiac than I had expected, despite a print that had been in the wars, so I felt stupid not to have seen more of the Peckinpah retrospective. I caught up with Gregory Nava's heartbreaking *El Norte* (1983), a milestone film about the plight of Central Americans in the US, and had an uproarious time listening to Nava's stories (he does the best John Wayne impersonation). Abbas Kiarostami's absorbing masterclass (which you can find at <http://www.moreliafilmfest.com/videos.php>)

required some patience from interviewer Geoff Andrew, because every one of his succinct questions got sidelined while Kiarostami gave the exhaustive context behind any possible answer – but that's Kiarostami's style.

From the intense documentary work in her fascinating show at the Whitechapel a couple of years ago, I had not expected the artist-photographer Sophie Calle to be so funny and self-mocking. In Morelia to support *Sophie Calle, Untitled*, a cogent, revealing documentary about her by Victoria Clay Mendoza, she was inspirational. Another discovery for me was the short film work of Seifollah Samadian, who co-directed 2001's *ABC Africa* with Kiarostami. The shorts he showed – about trees, animals and queuing in the rain – were very much in the vein of early direct poetic films such as Joris Ivens's *Rain* (1928). Among the treats I did not get around to were retrospectives devoted to Henri-Georges Clouzot, Christian Petzold (all the prints had Spanish subtitles only) and a small tribute to Universal Pictures, but I did go and see *Damsels In Distress* again, not merely because Whit Stillman was omnipresent but also because the Spanish title *Chicas en conflicto* made it sound even more alluring.

What's more difficult to pin down than what a festival shows is whether the mood was sympathetic and the right kind of exchanges were enabled. Morelia remains the very best I've experienced at creating that blend of the social and the cinephile. To be at a fairly intimate party where the major programmers of all the Cannes strands and the Berlin boss are present is rare indeed. But in Morelia anything seems possible, not least because the people who look after people work so incredibly hard. May it last many decades more. ☺



Been in the wars: 'Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid', part of the festival's Peckinpah retrospective



# ALL CHANGE IN THE ETERNAL CITY

Marco Müller's tenure gets off to a triumphant start, showcasing works of bold fragmentation and transformation

**By Simon Merle**

When Marco Müller was made artistic director of the Rome Film Festival, it seemed sensible to attend this until-now rather wretched event. Müller had done very well in Venice and several other major festivals before (notably Locarno and Rotterdam); something good, therefore, was to be expected. And yet the line-up's quality did come as a surprise, considering that Müller and his team could only get what the major autumn festivals weren't interested in; at least that's the theory, which implies that places like Locarno and Venice always know what's best and will also get it. But maybe even in this day and age of the world-sales agent, personal connections still mean something, especially in parts of planet Earth not yet under the control of certain global players – like Russia, for instance, and many other countries that were once part of the USSR.

With a mischievous grin one can say that the lone bad feature from that region shown in Rome came courtesy of a world-sales major: Bachtiar Chudojnazarov's *Waiting for the Sea* (*V ozidanii morja*), a heavily subsidised box of eye candy. On the other hand, the three real achievements – Kira Muratova's *Eternal Homecoming* (*Vecnoe vozvrascenie*), Alexei Fedorchenko's *Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari* (*Nebesnye zeni lugovykh Mari*) and Ivan Vyrypaev's *Delhi Dance* (*Tanets Deli*) – came without that kind of backing, even if the latter seems to have an Italian distributor.

Curiously enough, none of these three films tells a story in the common sense – they're all exercises in fragmentation. Of these, *Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari* is the formally least unusual: it's an anthology of several micro-stories, anecdotes, occurrences – 23 in all – some taking several minutes to tell, others just two or three shots. Like Fedorchenko's international breakthrough *Silent Souls* (*Osvjankij*, 2010), the new film is based on a work by Denis Osokin and set among the Mari, a Finno-Ugric people living in Central Russia. Yet the tone, this time around, is strikingly different: if *Silent Souls* was taut and muscular, *Celestial Wives* is free-wheeling, playful, at times gleefully crazy – let's mention only that one episode evolves around the sexual yearnings of a smitten forest spirit, while another includes an honest-to-god Mari zombie given short shrift by a cop who nonchalantly whips some shaman beads out of his uniform's pocket and tells the poor soul to get lost. There's a certain folkloric element to many of the stories yet it never feels sleazy and touristy in the Kusturica mode but hearty and rustic and actually funny, in a benign sense. The film's discrete, subtly documentary-like approach does that, in unison with the fresh, uninhibited acting. If one can imagine a combination of Inuit auteur Zacharias Kunuk and the Pasolini of the 'Trilogy of Life', one gets a very rough idea of



A real achievement: 'Celestial Wives of the Meadow Mari'

*It's difficult to imagine how the screenplay for 'Eternal Homecoming' must have looked – one imagines a notation system*

the way Fedorchenko's film looks and feels.

The works of Vyrypaev and Muratova, though, are something else altogether, in every possible sense. *Delhi Dance* consists of seven separate films that are connected in terms of their setting and characters. 'Setting' is almost too big a word here, as we're talking about nothing more than a bench in front of a white-tiled wall. And that's all one ever gets to see: a few square feet of a hospital corridor. Which is also to say that *Delhi Dance* certainly doesn't deny its theatrical roots; like Vyrypaev's last film *Oxygen* (*Kislород*, 2009), it's based on a play of his. The first short tells a rather simple story about a radiantly beautiful young dancer who's waiting at the hospital for news about her ailing mother while coming to terms with her desires. Short two develops the love theme. Short three starts off in a somewhat different direction, and

so on. In a certain way, the film moves forward, each short picking up on something from the preceding one. This doesn't, however, mean that the seven segments gel at some point – it's enough that in one segment the mother dies, in another she's alive and somebody else is dying. Occasionally dialogue is repeated; in other cases, variations on the dialogue are heard.

A similar approach is taken further in *Eternal Homecoming*, which is like the surrealist maximalist version of *Delhi Dance*'s melodramatic minimalism. Here we have a new setting for every change of scene, although some objects are used in each of them, like a painting or a small sculpture. The dialogue is often repeated, with just the tiniest variations in the phrasing, but the delivery changes massively from one scene to another; and so do the costumes and characters – people constantly look different although, according to the dialogue, they're always the same characters.

While everything about *Delhi Dance* is in the text, it's difficult to imagine how the screenplay for *Eternal Homecoming* must have looked, as it would be pages and pages of lines verging on the ridiculous. Looking at the film, one imagines something more like a notation system with different signs for the pitch of voice, tempo, particularities in the set design etc; everything that 'makes' this film is in categories outside the script.

Both films are variations on the ever-changing face of things that eternally remain the same, which may sound banal enough. But in both cases it's done with such aplomb, such staggering artistic assuredness, sheer force and power that they leave one dumb-struck. For these three alone, Rome was worth it – and there was so much else of similar excellence. What a closing event for the autumnal festival season! 🍷



Surrealist maximalist: 'Eternal Homecoming'



# BEYOND GHIBLI

Japanese cinema's international profile has declined in recent years. Did the capital's festival offer any new breakthroughs?

**By James Bell**

One question kept coming to mind while getting ready to travel to the recent Tokyo International Film Festival: where are all the contemporary Japanese films in UK cinemas? In 2012, only three new Japanese films got a full UK theatrical release: Ishii Yuya's *Mitsuko Delivers*, Miike Takashi's *Hara-Kiri* and Sono Sion's *Himizu*. Festivals such as London, Edinburgh, Raindance and Zipangu showcase selected recent titles but most modern Japanese cinema now barely registers – the indomitable Studio Ghibli aside.

The problem is perhaps that there's been no crossover figure in recent years. It's now a decade since Kitano Takeshi last had a significant UK hit with *Zatoichi* and just as long since the J-Horror wave dissipated. Hirokazu Koreeda, whose charming *I Wish* gets a release this month, is one figure who has seen at least some of his recent films distributed, as has Miike Takashi, but each forged his reputation in the UK over a decade ago. A more recent presence is the prolific Sono Sion, whose quirky films have real cult appeal but, despite being distributed, haven't attracted theatrical audiences in any great number.

It could also be that the make-up of theatrical distribution in the UK hasn't allowed audiences to become familiar with recent talent. That's certainly the view of Adam Torel, managing director of Third Window films, one of the few companies still pushing Japanese cinema in the UK. In June last year, Torel posted a public letter in which he wrote that following the "resounding opening weekend failure of [Sono's] *Himizu*", Third Window would cease theatrical distribution and concentrate exclusively on DVD releases. Torel went on to blame the UK's independent cinema sector, dominated as it is by two main companies, for not taking the risk and programming his titles.

New Japanese cinema, then, has largely lost

the cachet it once had in the UK, so the prospect of the Tokyo trip was especially interesting; would there be intriguing, commercially promising films that have slipped the net? In terms of numbers, the Japanese film industry is in a reasonably healthy state: Japan produced 441 features in 2011, up from 282 in 2000, and domestic titles took 54 per cent of the box-office in 2011, up from 31.8 per cent in 2000 (despite the industry as a whole suffering following the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami).

Celebrating its 25th edition this year, with an international programme and competition alongside the Japanese titles, TIFF has the reputation of occupying the more commercial middle ground in its programme of Japanese filmmaking (the rival TokyoFilmEx festival, held less than a month after TIFF, focuses on domestic independent cinema). Indeed, many of the Japanese films in the main selection were middlebrow, populist fare well-suited to the festival's current home in a multiplex in Tokyo's Roppongi Hills development. But TIFF's mainstream leanings are rather overstated, as the festival also includes a 'Japanese Eyes' selection devoted to independent productions.

Unsurprisingly, a number of films in the section concerned the 2011 earthquake. Iwabuchi Hiroki's *Chasing Santa Claus* was a touching, intimate DIY documentary in which the director goes to his hometown of Sendai in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, and again in December 2011 to see how the town is pulling together for Christmas. It's a small film, but one that made a good complement to *Japan in a Day*, the latest in Scott Free Production's YouTube/crowd-sourced compilation films, which opened the festival and offered a panoramic view of different Japanese people coping with the aftermath of the disaster.

More oblique and challenging was Kimura Bunyo's *Where Does Love Go?*, a claustrophobic two-hander set almost entirely within a

*The 'Japanese Eyes' section included films concerned with the 2011 earthquake, from DIY docs to the tale of a fugitive terrorist*

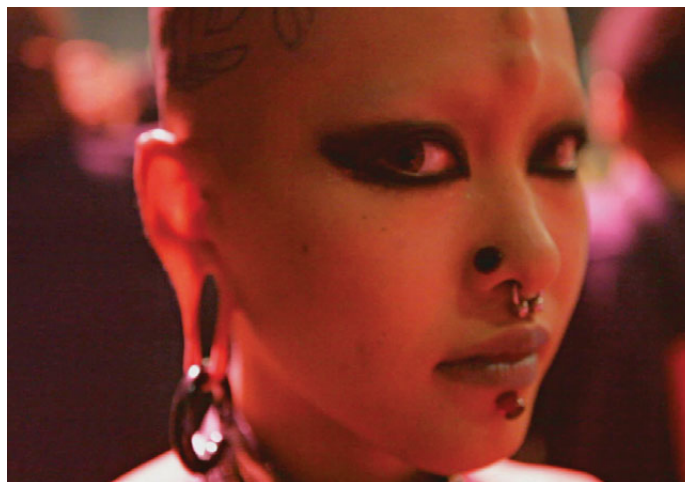
cramped apartment. The film is inspired by the case of Hirata Makato, a member of the doomsday cult group who released sarin gas onto the Tokyo subway in 1995. A fugitive for almost 17 years after the attacks, Hirata finally surrendered to police in December 2011. He had been sheltered by a woman and Kimura's film imagines their life together after their plan to move back to her home town of Fukushima is made impossible by the nuclear-reactor meltdown.

Neither of the above films is likely to travel far from Japan. A better prospect in that sense came with Shimote Daisuke's slightly knowingly offbeat *Kuro*, which wears its *nouvelle vague* pretensions a little too proudly yet still had an inventive energy and hipster appeal that suggests it could find an audience outside Japan. A cute, near-mute girl with an Anna Karina bob named Kuro is fired from her job at a bakery and then has a chance meeting with a photographer and a theatre director, and the three of them head to a deserted house by the sea. There's no real plot to speak of, Shimote instead staging several skits with nods to various directors and films, *Bande à Part* the most obvious among them.

The Japanese Eyes section competition was won by Tsuchiya Yutaka's innovative and provocative *GFP Bunny*. Tsuchiya made a considerable critical impact with his last film *Peep "TV" Show* (2004) but little had been heard from him since. *GFP Bunny* melds documentary, interviews with members of the public, footage of scientific experiments and dramatised scenes with commentary from Tsuchiya himself to tell a story based on the true case of a schoolgirl who slowly poisoned her mother with thallium in 2005. Tsuchiya takes that case as the jumping-off point for cinematic probings in a number of other directions, all suggestive of an alienation in modern Japanese life; we see the girl, who is bullied at school, dissecting frogs and uploading the footage to YouTube, and combing the internet for information on genetic and body manipulation. *GFP Bunny* is unlikely to be the Japanese film to bring UK audiences back into cinemas – and neither, in truth, were any others in the Japanese Eyes programme – but it's certainly one to look out for at festivals. 📺



Nouvelle vague in vogue: 'Kuro'



A feeling for alienation: 'GFP Bunny'



# Reader offers

## COMPETITIONS

### EALING REVISITED: FIVE COPIES TO BE WON

During its heyday, Ealing produced a string of classic films, including *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *The Lavender Hill Mob* and *The Ladykillers*, but there is much more to Ealing than these films, as this volume of new writing on the studio shows. The book addresses both well-known and less familiar aspects of Ealing's story, its films, actors and technicians. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

**Q. Which one of these segments from 'Dead of Night' (1945) was directed by Charles Crichton?**

- a. The Haunted Mirror
- b. The Golfing Story
- c. The Ventriloquist's Dummy



### TRIO OF FILMS: THREE NEW RELEASES ON DVD TO BE WON

Distributor New Wave bring three critically acclaimed films to DVD: Miguel Gomes's intense and poetic feature *Tabu*, Andrei Zvyagintsev's character-driven drama *Elena*, and Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi's impressive documentary *Five Broken Cameras*, which focuses on Burnat's filming of his village's non-violent protest against the building of a separation wall. We have three sets of all films to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

**Q. What is the title of Andrei Zvyagintsev's first feature?**

- a. The Banishment
- b. The Return
- c. Apocrypha



### HOLY MOTORS: COPIES ON DVD OR BLU-RAY TO BE WON

Leos Carax's striking *Holy Motors* created a buzz at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival and thereafter on its cinema release. It now comes to DVD and Blu-ray courtesy of Artificial Eye. Denis Lavant plays Monsieur Oscar, who over the course of a single day takes on ten guises, from gangster to millionaire, from troubled

parent to anarchic tramp, as he is driven around Paris in a stretch limo by his faithful driver Céline. We have five copies each on DVD and Blu-ray to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question and state your edition preference:

**Q. Which one of these Leos Carax films does NOT star Denis Lavant?**

- a. The Night Is Young
- b. Les Amants du Pont-Neuf
- c. Pola X



### FILMCRAFT: BOOKS ON FILM PROFESSIONS TO BE WON

*Producing* is the latest book in the FilmCraft series from Ilex Press that explores different film professions. The role of the producer can include everything from script development to securing financing to masterminding a film's marketing campaign. Authors Geoffrey Macnab and Sharon Swart explore the professional's role within the art

and the industry; the book features likes of producers Tim Bevan, Marin Karmitz, Jeremy Thomas, Jon Kilik, Lauren Shuler Donner, Jan Chapman and Peter Aalbæk Jensen. We have two sets of all six books in the series to give away, including *Costume Design*, *Directing*, *Screenwriting*, *Editing* and *Cinematography*.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

**Q. Who executive-produced Lars von Trier's 'Melancholia'?**

- a. Peter Aalbæk Jensen
- b. Lauren Shuler Donner
- c. Martin Karmitz



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Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Trio of Films Collection', 'Holy Motors', 'Ealing Studios Book', or 'FilmCraft Books' in the subject heading, to [s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk](mailto:s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk) Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Trio of Films competition', 'Holy Motors competition', 'Ealing Studios book competition' or 'FilmCraft Book competition' at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London WC1H 1LN

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**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Kathryn Bigelow's 'Zero Dark  
Thirty' puts CIA investigator  
Maya (Jessica Chastain,  
right) at the heart of the  
hunt for Osama bin Laden





# DUTY CALLS

*Hollywood didn't get to grips with the Vietnam War until years after the event. In our rolling-news age, Kathryn Bigelow's 'Zero Dark Thirty' arrives only 18 months after the bin Laden kill mission it depicts. But is such haste at the expense of perspective?*

**By Michael Atkinson**

**With Kathryn Bigelow's cold-blooded** *Zero Dark Thirty*, we may have the definitive 21st-century Asymmetrical War Film. Researched, written, shot, edited and released just 18 months after the events it graphically depicts, the movie affects a globe-hopping, hand-held immediacy in tracing, over a full decade, the trajectory of torture, fact-finding, manhunting and eventual mobilisation that results in Osama bin Laden's chestful of bullets. As a film story it is both scrupulously factual (most of the time) and at moments an alienated teen's gun fantasy, and therein reveals a kind of all-American sociopathy usually hidden by action-movie hubris and relegated to game-equipped suburban basements. What it might reveal about the Obama Era is a question we can only continue to formulate – just as, arguably, the purpose of this particular story and the manner in which it may best be told could have used a few years of incubation. But in the US ambivalence (or George W. Bush's dreaded “nuance”) is for pussies, and by mid-December





Bigelow's was already the most heavily awarded film of 2012, having netted Best Film nods from eight critics' associations, including the New York Film Critics Circle and the National Board of Review. Film critics, as a rule, take whatever opportunities they can to not appear to be pussies, which may be the only pertinent boot on the ground in this movie's seemingly unstoppable march toward the ultimate cultural self-congratulation, the Oscars.

If Obama harboured dark-night-of-the-soul doubts about the May 2011 raid that killed bin Laden, and might regard Bigelow's film the same way now, we can also imagine that Bush II is envious of both, particularly since half of the narrative's waterboarding warfare and tough-guy intelligence acquisition happened on his watch. Bigelow's film was controversial before anyone had even seen it, largely due to its screenplay's explicit suggestion, apparently fictional, that detainee torture resulted in the investigative lead that in the end led the CIA to bin Laden's house in Abbottabad. In contrast, the election-year charges that the Obama White House provided the production team (including writer/producer Mark Boal) with classified information are trifling and erroneous; even so, as WikiLeaks has demonstrated, high-security classification had long become in the US a perpetual-motion bureaucratic glacier of superfluous secrecy. But falsely maintaining, in 2012, that the widely condemned detainee programme, at Guantanamo Bay and various black sites around the world, was one of the pivotal actions that allowed the 9/11 era to find some kind of ostensible closure, with the point-blank assassination of an elderly diabetic, isn't merely a rebuke to Obama, who's stood squarely against the use of torture since his days in the Senate; it's a sanctification of American violence.

Not that we don't live in an era troubled, in the spaces between each other and in our deepest recesses, by the personal violence unleashed in the last 12 years – a point Bigelow is eager to make. The only context her film makes for the search for bin Laden, in ten years of history, is the litany of terrorist attacks perpetrated and attempted by al-Qaeda in London, New York, Saudi Arabia and Islamabad. The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars are mentioned only in passing, and never seen. The nature of 'asymmetry' – its civilian mask, its secret organisation, its use of suicide, its irrational M.O. – haunts us like few other principles these past years, and it's a paradigm cinema has been hard-pressed to deal with cogently. The methodology is diabolically destabilising to a modern culture predicated on comfort, convenience and entertainment, of course, but there's also the essential ambiguity of the conflicts that poisons their fighting – at least for the West. Only Europe's colonial wars and the protracted disaster of Vietnam are as morally compromised as the post-9/11 combats; and the movie evocations of those earlier conflicts, unrolling years after the fighting was over, were able to locate vast reserves of irony and doubt and even self-lacerating absurdity.

War films in general have required a little distance and acclimatisation – a cool-down period. The films made during World War II can largely be excused as propaganda, and it took until the mid-1950s, with *From Here to Eternity* (1953) and Robert Aldrich's definitive *Attack!* (1956), for American film to express the sense of trauma and unhappy cost that any authentic pop characterisa-



tion of war must command. The Korean War (excepting only Samuel Fuller's *The Steel Helmet*, released in 1951, less than four months after American troops crossed the 38th parallel) took almost four years to be crafted into drama, message and regret, starting with Anthony Mann's *Men in War* (1957). The Vietnam War, as we well know, was relentlessly televised, and yet, putting aside a few pungent docs and one risible agitprop orgasm (John Wayne's *The Green Berets*, 1968), three full years had to pass after the last airlift before the bandages came off and America permitted itself to begin to finger the scabs and scars.

Speculate on the reasons though we may, the cultural pause allowed for some shadow to fall between the event and its simulation, between 'the Real' and how we choose to re-imagine it as the recreated past. Today – in the epoch of in-your-face, anywhere-anytime conflict, the post-9/11 'forever war' world, which may never completely cease – no such breathing room exists. The Asymmetrical War Film, debuting with the thousands of hours of 9/11 news footage starting at 9 a.m. EST that morning, has boiled and rampaged simultaneously alongside 'the Real', replacing it in predictable Baudrillardian fashion, in the form of docs, 'embedded news', Hollywood home-front weepies, TV series, videogames, infantry-

**SEARCH AND DESTROY**  
'Zero Dark Thirty' moves from back-room scenes involving CIA investigator Maya (Jessica Chastain, below) to graphic depiction of the climactic night raid itself







man blogcasts, government propaganda, cell-phone reporting and of course the YouTube War – the infinitely episodic, ‘non-professional’ war epic shot by the soldiers and jihadists themselves, and posted online either as raw cam footage or in post-MTV montages. (The difference in tone has been revealing: the jihadist videos, like the infamous ‘Dirty Kuffar’, are righteous, exultant and rich in historical statistics, while the occupying troops’ films have been goofy, time-killing gags, almost completely lacking in conviction.)

Let loose the dog-films of war, in a first in the history of communications: a full-on address in the new virtual agora of a war, not five years after it is finished sending home body parts, but continuously, endlessly, during its maelstrom. Certainly, Bigelow’s film feels like some kind of culmination of this dynamic, coming so close on the heels of its inciting bit of authentic bloodshed that it will inevitably become how we all perceive the event itself. The movie’s bullet-headed single-mindedness ensures it; the textural ambivalence and perspective and characterising vision we get in all memorable films about war and espionage are absent, leaving only the procession of facts (and unmarked prevarications), from the harrowing 9/11 emergency phonecall recordings to the final body shots.

This may be a hallmark of the Asymmetrical War Film – a procedural soullessness, a forward-motion, get-it-done determination. And indeed – for all its scenes in conference rooms and its agent protagonist Maya (Jessica Chastain), who never wields a gun – *Zero Dark Thirty* sometimes has the feel of a first-person-shooter videogame, a new edition of *Call of Duty*. Games like *CoD* maintain a pop-cultural supremacy at the moment that dwarfs any film franchise, and yet there is virtually nothing to them besides run-and-gun, find-and-shoot. The narrative of *CoD* (especially in its predominantly popular multiplayer mode) contains nothing that cannot be resolved by a headshot. Bigelow’s movie follows the same philosophy – for two-and-a-half hours, and ten years of diegetic time, the only objective is to find and exterminate. It’s not going too far, succumbing too readily to a pervasive modern anxiety, to see this simplistic

*‘Call of Duty’ contains nothing that cannot be resolved by a headshot. Bigelow’s movie follows the same philosophy*

homicidal function as fuelling so much of American life, from the Iraqi invasion itself to America’s preponderance of public mass-murder shootings, all of it confronting the complex dilemmas in contemporary living with the brute force of a fully loaded assault rifle.

But surely the gift of good war films, hot or cold, is the humane erasure of the cold equations of jingoistic bloodlust and Manichean militarism. Bigelow had always before seemed open to other possibilities. However much *The Hurt Locker* (2008) was a remake of *Top Gun* transposed onto Iraq, while garnering a plethora of awards for being the tough-skinned, up-to-the-minute Asymmetrical War Film everyone apparently thought we were waiting for, the movie still percolated with doubt and contrived pathos and collateral damage. Its array of narrative threads and mysteries is the film’s salvation.

### THE GLINT OF STEEL

Always a muscular, sharpshooting actionista in a brawny man’s movie world, Bigelow may never actually make another movie as pitiless as *Zero Dark Thirty*, but what’s more fascinating is how she has evolved, in nearly the blink of an eye, into the dead-serious, intellectually respectable doyenne of the new war film, as genuinely hardboiled as the muscle-bound soldiers in her films. Not long ago, and ever since her career sputtered to life with the dreamy, Anger-ish biker flick *The Loveless* (1981), Bigelow was a grande dame of new genre; her signature films – *Near Dark* (1987), *Blue Steel* (1989), *Point Break* (1991) and *Strange Days* (1995) – are feverishly made, self-consciously meta-macho and infectiously flashy. *Point Break* in particular has attracted cult status, brimming as it is with satirical corn and an acute sense of designed gorgeousness.

Her early films represented the sort of stylistic intensity that rises and falls in popularity quickly, and the new century saw her profile in decline – until embedded-journalist Mark Boal’s screenplay for *The Hurt Locker* and a low budget (\$15 million) gave her the chance for a trimmer, steelier, less bullshit sensibility makeover. Now, just two movies and a stack of awards later, she’s practically institutionalised as the era’s Hemingway or James Jones, the anointed chronicler of postmodern wartime.

But the queen of the Asymmetrical War Film has never been to war – a circumstance that enables her to make a claim that no one of Hemingway’s or Fuller’s experience would ever make: that *Zero Dark Thirty* is “apolitical”. It’s what a *CoD* player might say, if pressed to account for the endless replays of gory combat that fill his day. Let’s leave aside the issue of the ginned-up torture-means-finding-bin Laden thread; since when is narrowing down a global manhunt and assassination to its pure procedural facts not political?

No one would argue that bin Laden should have been spared the full brunt of the violence he helped to initiate, but it’s not too much to ask – and has never been, since the days of *The Birth of a Nation* – for cinema to mediate our deadliest deeds and darkest history, when it dares to turn war into narrative spectacle. And one primal step in that process is taking responsibility for the political meaning of your own images.

**i** **‘Zero Dark Thirty’ is released in the UK on 25 January, and is one of our Films of the Month on page 86**









IT TAKES TWO TO DJANGO  
Dr King Schultz (Christoph Waltz, left) and freed slave Django (Jamie Foxx, right) join forces in Quentin Tarantino's 'Django Unchained'

# TRAIL BLAZER

In 'Django Unchained' the two strands of the spaghetti western – the blood-soaked revenge saga and the jokey pastiche – are twisted together by Quentin Tarantino, with a modern seasoning of racial politics. But unlike Clint Eastwood's *Man with No Name*, these westerners talk – a lot

By Kim Newman

**The jury is still out** on Quentin Tarantino's use of music cues lifted from earlier film soundtracks – David Bowie's 'Cat People (Putting out the Fire)' (from the Paul Schrader remake) in the climax of *Inglourious Basterds*, or Bernard Herrmann's *Twisted Nerve* whistle in *Kill Bill, Vol I*.

On the one hand, these borrowings add layers to the referentiality which is always an element of Tarantino's postmodern genre cinema; on the other, it feels a little like cheating – shoring up an audience's feeling for the present movie by reminding them how much they liked something else. The ouroboros snake-eating-itself effect is underlined by the use of Quincy Jones's *Ironsides* theme in *Kill Bill*, referring not to the TV show but to the kung-fu film *Five Fingers of Death*, made in 1972 when Shaw Brothers were pioneering the practice of borrowing music (in their case without credit, not to evoke or reference anything but simply to save money).

Tarantino's *Django Unchained* opens and closes with theme songs from key spaghetti westerns – which, at least in most cinemas, sound richer and stranger through modern sound systems than they did in the fleapits where they had their original theatrical exposure, or on various vinyl, VHS and DVD releases. The opening titles are accompanied by Luis Bacalov's romantic theme for Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1965), with lyrics by Franco Migliacci, performed by Rocky Roberts; 160-odd minutes later, the film caps its climax with the jaunty song from Enzo Barboni's *They Call Me Trinity* (1970), by Franco Micalizzi.

Both those films follow the spaghetti-western pattern set by Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), in which a wandering stranger gets involved in a small town where injustice rules and factions of villains are fighting each other and oppressing a few honest folk, but they come at different ends of the cycle and have very different moods. *Django* is gothic, gruesome, violent and melodramatic; its

signature moments include Django (Franco Nero, who cameos in Tarantino's film) dragging a coffin out of the wilderness and a corrupt preacher not only having his ear cut off (an incident which must have stuck in Tarantino's mind) but being forced to eat it. *Trinity* is a comic jape, with a lazy hero (Terence Hill) whose skills are celebrated in the song ("he's the top of the West, always cool, he's the best"), but who generally defuses conflict with slapstick and a smile; its signature moments include a pre-*Blazing Saddles* beans-make-you-fart gag.

Both films were huge international successes in their day (though *Django* was originally refused a certificate in Britain, so western fans had to be content with the excerpts seen in *The Harder They Come*), inspiring sequels and rip-offs. If Tarantino isn't making a film called *Trinity Unchained*, it's because Nero's grim avenger has a longer shadow than Hill's feckless nice guy – though, incidentally, *Trinity* was a bigger grosser than any previous Italian western, including Leone's.

After Django, the character – sometimes played by Nero, most often not – appeared in many, many films, manifesting in oddities like Giulio Questi's truly surreal *Django, Kill!* (1967) and Sergio Garrone's pre-*High Plains Drifter* horror western *Django the Bastard* (1969), in which the gunslinger is a ghost. It's entirely in keeping with this mutability that Tarantino's Django (Jamie Foxx) should be black, yet display a typical western hero arc as historical injustice (the entire system of slavery) and a personal trauma (separation from his wife Broomhilda) inspire him to acquire a mystical selection of martial skills, including deadly accuracy with a gun and the ability to escape from serial-style perils with plausible fast talk and Bre'r Rabbit-like cunning. (Bre'r Rabbit is the first blaxploitation hero: discuss.)

This Django ("the d is silent," he explains) even has the romantic obsession that wasn't part of the



*Famously, Clint Eastwood went through the script of 'A Fistful of Dollars' and eliminated dialogue, but Tarantino adds in paragraphs of the stuff*

make-up of Nero's original, but is the subject of the song, which harps on the hero's lost love and his need to move on. The opening of Tarantino's film, with blood-red titles and whip-zooms, finds the back-scarred but defiant hero among other slaves, and rams home the injustices of the era (it's 1858, two years before the Civil War – though the Tarantino who killed Hitler two years early isn't likely to respect historical accuracy beyond broad strokes). Django's arc, after being bought and freed and partnered by German dentist-bounty hunter Dr King Schultz (Christoph Waltz), includes being ridiculous (dressed up in knee-breeches and ruffles) and naked (hung upside-down with a knife at his testicles) as well as coolly heroic. At the end, with the *Trinity* theme playing and seemingly every slave-owner in the region shot full of holes, his wonder horse Tony is doing comical dressage steps to make Broomhilda (Kerry Washington) smile. It's as if grim Django has become grinning Trinity; or hawk-faced, realistic silent western star William S. Hart has turned into fancily dressed show-off Tom Mix (whose horse was also called Tony), populariser of the embroidered duds still mockingly referred to as a cowboy outfit.

As Tim Lucas's sidebar (see page 38) indicates, Tarantino is happy to evoke specific spaghetti westerns and related, slavery-themed films (even *Mandingo* is Italian-backed – a Dino De Laurentiis production). Like the *Kill Bill* films (2003 and 2004) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2008), *Django Unchained* takes care to reference its models with film technique and imagery as well as casting, in-joke names and general chatter; signing up Robert Richardson, the cinematographer known for work with Oliver Stone and Martin Scorsese, as part of the team has doubtless contributed to the increasing visual richness of this most verbal of directors' work.

Yet at the same time, motormouth Tarantino is constitutionally unable to make a spaghetti western. Famously, Clint Eastwood went through the script of *A Fistful of Dollars* and eliminated dialogue, but Tarantino always goes through and adds in paragraphs of the stuff. Leone (though he let Eli Wallach ramble in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*), Corbucci et al preferred to minimise the talk and get to the action. Post-synch dubbing, multi-lingual casting and makeshift translation of multi-authored scripts conspired to dissociate spaghetti-western characters from the words that came out of their mouths anyway. If you wanted to listen to something, there was always the operatic scoring (the great Ennio Morricone

provides a new song for *Django Unchained*, which makes up for the hip hop that's likely to date fastest).

After discovering Christoph Waltz's way with lengthy, pointed speeches in *Inglourious Basterds*, it's possible the entire justification for *Django Unchained* was to get the actor back in the saddle – no one else quite gets that pleasure in eloquence that Tarantino himself displays. When Schultz's beautifully formed sentences fall on stony ground – and all the white Americans (and Australians) in this film are imbeciles, with the possible exception of slave-connoisseur Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio) – he modestly explains, in a marvellously throwaway aside, that his failure to communicate is down to the fact that English is his second language.

## BLACK AND WHITE

King Schultz is the hero's liberator, mentor and sidekick. He and Django have a profitable spell as bounty hunters in a montage modelled on John Ford's *The Searchers*, a key western whose theme – the rescue of a captured woman from a racial 'other' who has taken sexual ownership – is replayed through a glass darkly, with a black abductee and white captors, and no sense that enforced miscegenation will drive Django to mercy-kill his wife the way Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) feels tempted to execute his niece.

When spaghetti westerns touched on race, they tended – given the pool of Italian and Spanish actors available for supporting roles – to present oppositions between white and Hispanic factions, seldom even tackling Indian issues. But in Tarantino's teaming of Schultz and Django there are echoes of several 1960s-70s westerns that feature not entirely harmonious black-and-white hero teams, set against white dimwits in the era of slavery. In Sydney Pollack's *The Scalphunters* (1967), educated, articulate Joseph Winfield Lee (Ossie Davis), who tries to argue that he is technically a Comanche not a runaway slave, is foisted off on wilderness-smart but illiterate Joe Bass (Burt Lancaster), and it takes a fight in a riverbed which whitens Lee with clay and darkens Bass with mud to make them realise they're complementary equals. In Paul Bogart's *Skin Game* (1971), which riffs on the symbiosis of bounty hunter and outlaw in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), Quincy (James Garner) poses as a slave-trader and sells his slippery partner Jason (Louis Gossett Jr) over and over, knowing that he will always escape – though, inevitably, the scam begins to wear thin for the black man.

**KILL CALVIN**  
Django's wife Broomhilda (Kerry Washington, far right) must be rescued from slave-owner Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio, left) and his faithful steward Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson, right)





Of course, in *Django Unchained* Schultz is not an American (Klaus Kinski is a precedent as a German spaghetti-western star, and the whole spaghetti cycle arguably grew out of the German westerns based on the 19th-century novels of Karl May). Thus he is excused from guilt over slavery, an institution he despises – which means the partnership in *Django Unchained* isn't riven by the festering sores that make for rocky patches in the relationships of earlier interracial conman teams.

The festering sores here are cultural and make *Django Unchained* creditably among the most anti-white American films since the blaxploitation boom of the 1970s. All white Americans here are fools or rogues; in a scene which wouldn't be out of place in *Blazing Saddles*, a pre-Klan group of masked racist riders argue about the uselessness of their sack hoods, with eyeholes too small to see through. And the disposable whiskery, inarticulate (a prime sin in the Tarantinoverse) goons who back up the well-spoken (if cracked) Candie are effortlessly manipulated by the film's most radical revision of a well-worn black stereotype, Candie's slave steward Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson). White-haired, bald-pated, portly and faking a shuffling limp, Stephen is in the line of descent from Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom (the name came to epitomise a subservient, complacent, toadying black man – though Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an incendiary, abolitionist tract and her Uncle Tom isn't an Uncle Tom) and the *Song of the South*'s tale-spinner Uncle Remus, or the Uncle Ben whose smiling image still adorns packets of supermarket rice.

Psychopathically devoted to his maniacal white master, Stephen is also the smartest man on the plantation – a freak like Jackson's born supervillain in *Unbreakable* – and the only character who can see through the word-storm King Schultz habitually blows to conceal his true intentions. Candie muses on one of the great questions of slavery – “why don't they just kill us?” – as Stephen survives and prospers in the system; others have asked why the Jews didn't overwhelm concentration-camp guards. In the real world, this is still hotly debated; in Tarantino's universe, it's because the masses of victims are non-speaking parts, and the conflicts – which boil down to face-offs between chatty whites Candie and Schultz and superhuman blacks Stephen and Django – are carried by articulate demigods.

Schultz signs on for Django's crusade because “no German could refuse to help a Siegfried”, interpreting Broomhilda's captivity on Candie's ranch as Brunhilde's imprisonment by Wotan – perhaps mishearing, since the credits suggest the heroine (rather passive, considering Tarantino's usual liking for kick-ass Pam Grier types) is named not after the character from the *Nibelungenlied* but the strip-cartoon witch Broom-Hilda. This is the Tarantino approach in a nutshell: he puts pop culture and high culture in a blender, with a big target (white America's blood-soaked history) in sight and a scattergun to hand, but is easily distracted by a turn of phrase, a trivia footnote, a music choice or an actor rescued from a career wilderness. No wonder *Django Unchained* can encompass the whole five-year evolution of a western sub-genre from grand guignol to spoof within the running time of a single, roadshow-length movie.



**'Django Unchained' is released in the UK on 18 January, and is reviewed on page 90**



*Like the 'Kill Bill' films and 'Inglourious Basterds', 'Django Unchained' takes care to reference its models with film technique and imagery as well as in-jokes*



**DJANGO REBORN**  
Franco Nero, who played Django in the original 1965 film, makes a cameo in 'Django Unchained', left; above, Jamie Foxx as the new incarnation



# GOING BACK TO MY ROOTS

The new film by Quentin Tarantino (inset) doesn't just reference westerns, but a whole range of 1960s and 70s exploitation films dealing with race

By Tim Lucas



## THE GREAT SILENCE

(Sergio Corbucci, 1968)  
The winter passages in *Django Unchained* pay tribute to this, arguably the greatest of Corbucci's westerns, in which the raging heart of a ghostly, snowbound Utah belongs to a widowed black woman (Vonetta McGee) determined to avenge her husband, whose murder was arranged by a would-be suitor. An unlikely but effective Jean-Louis Trintignant stars as Silence, a mute bounty hunter hired by the widow to stop another: Klaus Kinski's Loco – a doll-faced psychotic who murders for profit, within the letter of the law. A sucker-punch downbeat ending points an accusatory finger at history and the greed of 'good people'.



## GOODBYE UNCLE TOM

(Gualtiero Jacopetti & Franco Prosperi, 1971)  
This lacerating epic describes itself as a documentary, but it's more of an essay from the *Mondo Cane* team – a cry for black justice in the years following the King and Malcolm X assassinations. Most of its inflammatory calls to slit the white man's throat were removed from the export version, leaving the best of its incendiary bounty: an Italian camera crew's anachronistic tour of working slave ships, slave markets, stud farms and plantations in the 19th-century American South – recreations both astonishing and appalling, yet not without some Fellini-esque winks of excess and the baroque.



## THE INTRUDER

(Roger Corman, 1961)  
Decades before Tarantino's *True Romance* script detonated the 'n' word in a classic dialogue between Dennis Hopper and Christopher Walken, US films could be implicitly or 'patriotically' (wartime) racist, but white guilt often prevented them from addressing racism directly. Boris Vian's 1946 French novel *I Spit on Your Graves* (*J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*), filmed in France in 1959, showed that such a hot issue could best be tackled within the confines of exploitation cinema, and Corman took the dare with this incendiary breakthrough. William Shatner stars as a rabble rouser determined to inflame a Missouri community against a classroom-integration court ruling. The prophet didn't turn a profit, but legions of imitators would.



## THE LEGEND OF NIGGER CHARLEY

(Martin Goldman, 1972)  
If Jamie Foxx's *Django* has an antecedent in exploitation cinema, Franco Nero is the namesake but former American football defensive back Fred Williamson is the template. Williamson proved himself as an actor and movie star in this saga about an enslaved blacksmith, granted freedom on his master's deathbed but goaded into living as an outlaw by the hatred of a loathsomely depicted white society. A serious, well-acted look at the dark underside of Americana, somewhat compromised by scoring its 19th-century story with 1970s funk – something Tarantino does too, but with better-judged attention to shock and contrast.





### FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE

(Sergio Leone, 1965)

Most people know that *A Fistful of Dollars* was based on Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, and that *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is the epic, but this centrepiece of Leone's 'Man with No Name' trilogy was the first spaghetti western to reach for real greatness and become something operatic, psychological and, for a sweet moment in time, *sui generis*. The chiming pocket watch of Indio (Gian Maria Volonté) – whenever its baleful chiming stops, someone dies – could be the template behind Tarantino's approach to writing dialogue. His dialogue teases and pokes at the viewer in a taunting dance of death; and when it stops, things happen.



### DJANGO

(Sergio Corbucci, 1965)

A Civil War veteran who's lost everything but his ability to shoot arrives in a muddy border town dragging a coffin behind him. He's dressed in black because that's the way Franco Nero (whose surname means black) wanted it – and a case could be made that the spaghetti western is 19th-century-set *film noir*, with stories that put guns back in the hands of ambitious men who have learned too much about death. There's a racial angle too in that *Django* – named for the nimble-fingered gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt – opposes an early, red-hooded form of the Ku Klux Klan devoted to killing Mexicans. There were dozens more *Django* films, some starring Nero, but only Ferdinando Baldi's *Django, Prepare a Coffin* (1968) is a true sequel.



### NAVAJO JOE

(Sergio Corbucci, 1966)

Tarantino credits this racially themed heist western with ushering more realistic violence into cinema, thanks to Burt Reynolds's frenzied, no-holds-barred, physical performance. His character, a Navajo, is reluctantly made sheriff by a white community to protect \$500,000 from the Indian-scalping gang of Aldo Sambrell, a half-breed whose self-loathing is so immense that he ends up putting a bullet in the back of his last loyal follower. Tepid in characterisation but gangbusters on iconography, it's driven by a robust score from 'Leo Nichols' – or, as you know him, Ennio Morricone.



### THE SOUL OF NIGGER CHARLEY

(Larry G. Spangler, 1973)

The titles of the two films in the Nigger Charley diptych seem misassigned; this second act is more the stuff of legend, and may be the first sequel to mythologise its protagonist through the hope he embodies to his followers – as would become *de rigueur* after *Mad Max 2*. While *Legend* has minor western elements, *Soul* is more fully fledged in the genre, with stylistic nods to *The Wild Bunch* as Charley leads the survivors of various massacred black camps to relieve a white-supremacist gang of a train shipment of gold they are escorting to Mexico. Once they have the gold, it becomes the price for the freedom of 71 slaves in the gang's keeping.



### MANDINGO

(Richard Fleischer, 1975)

This bluntly sexual saga about slave masters, traders and lovers – based on a 1957 novel that spawned numerous sequels as well as a play – continues to suffer an undeserved camp reputation; if people chuckle while watching it, it's because its frankness makes them uncomfortable. This is an ironic panorama of a heinous social system within which meaningful human relationships are nevertheless possible – which they weren't always within 'civilised' antebellum society. Black children may be used as foot stools to conduct the rheumatism from the slave-master's feet, but the white women aren't treated much better.



### JOSHUA

(Larry G. Spangler, 1976)

In 1975 Fred Williamson began scripting his own vehicles and cementing his own western image à la Nero, with black clothes and a stogie. Aside from an amateurish score that will drive you crazy, this film – about a Civil War veteran whose homecoming is ruined when his mother is murdered by a gang of outlaws, whom he proceeds to track and kill – is one of his best, an American revenge saga rife with spaghetti-western tropes, as well as the kind of bizarre deaths and body-count storytelling expected from the *giallo*. Think *The Bride Wore Black* with a testosterone twist. Fred's next stop: Enzo G. Castellari's *The Inglorious Bastards*...







**DISSOLVED PARAMETERS**  
Polanski in 'The Tenant',  
above, and Jack Nicholson in  
'Chinatown', opposite – films  
whose worlds are closer than  
those of most movies to the  
ugly realities and surrealities  
outside the cinema

# POLANSKI

## AND THE GROTESQUE

*Violence and humiliation, sexual excess and transvestism, absurd humour and the transgression of taboos – Roman Polanski's films, showcased in a BFI Southbank season, are laced with grotesquerie. But their power relies on a carefully crafted sense of reality*

**By Philip Horne**

When we think of Roman Polanski's films and the intensity of the experience they embody, one inescapable strain that seems vital to their effect – and part of his sensibility – is his particular version of the grotesque. 'Grotesque' is a slippery term, but perhaps here we can take it to involve representations that in some way transgress against taboos – sometimes not the overt challenge to censorship of *Freaks* or *The Human Centipede*, but taboos of which we weren't even conscious. The slitting in *Chinatown* (1974) of Jack Nicholson's nose (by Polanski in person) and the subsequent realistic representation of iodine, bandages and the wound's slow healing process don't break any rules of the Hays or any other written Code, but first makes us flinch with disgust, then places an unignorable white patch right in the centre of the leading man's face – putting the viewer in a fictional world in which the normal parameters may dissolve, one closer than usual to the ugly realities and surrealities outside the cinema.

While we're on the nose, the supremely unsettling *The Tenant* (1976) has the concierge (Shelley Winters) blow hers noisily as she shows the nervous would-be new tenant of a Paris apartment-block (played again by Polanski himself) up to see what will be the site of his disintegration. The note sounded is arresting but not exaggerated – Polanski's tact requires a







BET NATIONAL ARCHIVE (D. CORBIS) (C)





constant sense of a reality against which such oddities will seem odd (perhaps one reason his interesting and perverse 1972 sex comedy *What?* lacks focus, though 1967's consistently grotesque *The Fearless Vampire Killers* is a darkly amusing cartoon nightmare). *Chinatown*'s bandages recur, swaddling the head of the hospitalised victims in *The Tenant* and framing a gaping mouth and staring eyes to sear on our minds that film's emblematic scream. Making his film about the Holocaust, *The Pianist* (2002), Polanski remarked: "I wanted it to look like scenes in life." As with the nightmare in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), the real horror is the irruption of the world of dreams into waking consciousness: "This is no dream. This is really happening!"

One reason for this skewed realism may be that for Polanski the Holocaust was "scenes in life" – he famously spent his wartime childhood hiding from the Nazis (pretending not to be Jewish), and saw worse things, probably, than almost any other living filmmaker. At the liberation, "German corpses had been left behind in the streets, and these the Poles defiled, excreting on them or propping empty vodka bottles between their legs" (*Roman by Polanski*, 1984). The appeal in *The Pianist* of adapting *Death of a City*, the 1946 memoir by the Polish pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman, seems to have been its dry, dazed, sardonic, sod's-law tone and unSpielbergian preoccupation with survivor's guilt – in anecdotes like that of the concealed mother who smothered her baby to prevent their discovery by the Gestapo, only for its death-rattle to give her away. Polanski's harrowing exposure to persecution – and his awareness of Nazi representations of the Jew as grotesque figure, while he was able to pass as an Aryan – seem connected to his acute sensitivity to persecution of other kinds, and to the way it can be internalised, producing a sense of the self as grotesque, undesirable, abject.

Humiliation, in fact, with its correlative complacency, is a consistent presence in the oeuvre – making its first appearances through the inspiration of Beckett and the

*"German corpses had been left behind," Polanski recalled of the war, "and these the Poles defiled, excreting on them or propping bottles between their legs"*

Theatre of the Absurd. The bleak pseudo-music-hall, quasi-silent-comedy-duo pairing of *Waiting for Godot*'s Vladimir and Estragon inspires the sad, plucky heroes of early shorts like *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (*Dwaj ludzie z szafa*, 1957) and the tramps in *Mammals* (*Ssaki*, 1962), while *Endgame*'s master-slave relation underlies the grotesque pantomime of *The Fat and the Lean* (*Le Gros et le Maigre*, 1961), where the extraordinarily agile and expressive Polanski himself plays the underdog, tethered like a goat, finally abandoning his dream of getting to Paris, visible in the distance. It reappears in the delightful opening scene on the raft in the flawed *Pirates* (1986), with a ravenous Walter Matthau as the captain hungrily eyeing the cabin boy.

Like Beckett in *Happy Days* or *Rockaby*, Polanski has a fascinated, often sympathetic imagination of the lives of women, and not just beautiful young victims, as in *Tess* (1979). His magnificent short *When Angels Fall* (*Gdy spadaja anioły*, 1959) takes as its subject a very old woman, a 'toilet granny', working as an attendant in a sordid (men's) public lavatory; she has an extraordinary face, lined and sunken, and largely unmoving as the drunks, homosexuals, officials and other micturators come and go, but her gleaming eyes show an inner passion. The film conveys her memories dazzlingly by shifting from black-and-white into muted, poetic colour for the scenes from her earlier life, where she's played first by the actress who would become Polanski's first wife, Barbara Kwiatkowska and then, daringly, as a spurned mother, by Polanski himself in drag. Touchingly, her aged face both is and isn't grotesque: the pathos is such that the film doesn't seem voyeuristic – it's in the mode of Flaubert's story *A Simple Heart*, an unpatronising story of love, misfortune and unrelenting menial labour.

Wearing women's clothes – which in Polanski's films at least gives off a grotesque affect – indeed runs throughout his career as a motif. The glorious scene in *Cul-de-sac* (1966) where the bald Donald Pleasence as the cuckolded, midlife-crisis husband finds a nightie and is made to put it on by his nubile young wife Françoise Dorléac – then lipstick and eyeliner (the camera serves as his mirror) – shows the childish playacting of the mismatched couple, the dangerous excitement of sexual experimentation. "What are you doing tonight, baby?" leers Dorléac like a macho seducer, and

**WOMAN'S WORLD**  
'Rosemary's Baby', left, and 'When Angels Fall', right, offer very different visions of women's lives, one spiralling into paranoid nightmare, the other resting on an unvoyeuristic pathos



# POLANSKI IN POLAND

*Polanski's career got off to a flying start at home thanks to bold ambition, influential friends and hired goons*

**By Michael Brooke**

Roman Polanski was assistant director on Andrzej Munk's film *Bad Luck* (*Zezowate szczenie*, 1959), a black comedy about a man trying to live a normal life in Poland from the 1930s to the 1950s, only to be buffeted by desperately unfortunate chains of circumstance. There's been a tendency to emphasise Polanski's own bad luck – growing up as a Jewish child in Nazi-occupied Poland and losing his mother at Auschwitz, friends like Munk and composer Krzysztof Komeda to tragic accidents and his wife Sharon Tate to the Manson gang – and using this as the basis of dollar-book Freudian explanations for everything from his fondness for the macabre to aspects of his personal life that have been extensively reported elsewhere.

Polanski seems to have little patience with this notion, and understandably so. What is immediately striking about his early career – from forays into stage and screen acting in the early 1950s to his nationally unprecedented Best Foreign Language Film Oscar nomination for his feature debut *Knife in the Water* (*Noz w wodzie*, 1962) – is the sense of an extended run of very good luck indeed. Just into his twenties, he was spotted on stage by Lodz Film School director Antoni Bohdziewicz, who hired him to play a peasant boy in a diploma film. There, he met recent graduate Andrzej Wajda, who hired him for his feature debut *A Generation* (*Pokolenie*, 1954). Although Polanski's supporting role was substantially cut, he learned a huge amount from Wajda and his cinematographer Jerzy Lipman.

This emboldened him to apply for the five-year directing course at Lodz (Bohdziewicz commended him to the examiners as “a little wild, but shows promise”). Two years into his course, the cultural thaw of October 1956 that instituted a creative explosion in Poland ensured that Polanski was among the country's first generation of postwar filmmakers who didn't have to bend the knee to compulsory socialist realism. And Polanski took full advantage of relaxed travel restrictions to visit his half-sister in Paris, gorging himself on the latest French and American films before heading to Cannes for the world premiere of *Kanal* (1956), Wajda's follow-up to *A Generation*.

Although his autobiographical short *The*



**Domestic frustrations: 'Two Men and a Wardrobe'**

*Bicycle* (1955) had to be abandoned when part of the negative was ruined, the other films Polanski made both at Lodz and immediately afterwards survive, and are surprisingly easy to see (as well as this month's BFI Southbank screenings, they've been included as extras on several DVDs). Even more remarkably, his first completed films, *Murder* (*Moderstwo*, 1957) and *A Toothful Smile* (*Uśmiech zebiczny*, 1957), plunge comprehensively into the now-familiar Polanski universe. The three-shot *Murder* depicts an unmotivated and unpunished killing, while *A Toothful Smile* is a voyeuristic tease that delivers on its promise of female nudity, but far too briefly to give the thwarted protagonist (and the equally disappointed viewer) much pleasure.

*Let's Break up the Ball* (*Rozbijemy*, 1957) was more of a practical joke than the intended compulsory documentary exercise. Officially planned as a banal account of an open-air dance, it was trashed mid-filming by a gang of hooligans who – it quickly transpired – had been hired by Polanski for that exact purpose. Threatened with expulsion, he was defended by Munk (an inveterate prankster himself) on the grounds that the film did qualify as a legitimate documentary record.

Polanski's next project was planned from the outset to make his international reputation. Hearing that Expo 58 in Brussels would include an experimental short-film competition, he made the openly absurdist *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1957) with the aim of achieving exposure for himself and Krzysztof Komeda, who had never scored a film before but would become Polanski's most trusted collaborator until his premature death in 1969. The mission succeeded: the film won the bronze medal and was praised in *Sight & Sound* for “turning everything it observes, the pathos as well as the violence, into a kind of poetic slapstick”. It was screened in London that September,

in the Free Cinema series's fourth, all-Polish programme, and given a commercial release in Poland – a first for a film-school short.

More surrealism came with *The Lamp* (*Lampa*, 1959), whose fascination with disembodied doll parts, cracked and peeling textures and chittering harpsichord soundtrack has more in common with the work of Polanski's fellow Brussels laureate Walerian Borowczyk. His diploma film, the 21-minute, colour, flamboyantly baroque *When Angels Fall*, imbued the life of a toilet attendant with a sense of history and meaning as she reminisces about her past – which includes a World War II sequence drawn from Polanski's own first-hand memory.

Throughout this period, Polanski worked on other people's films, usually as an actor or assistant director, while trying to make his own feature debut. While waiting for *Knife in the Water* to be greenlit and polishing the script with Komeda's friend Jerzy Skolimowski, he returned to the world of *Two Men and a Wardrobe* in two more shorts depicting fractious relationships between physically mismatched men. In the French-produced *The Fat and the Lean* (1961), Polanski played a put-upon servant; the snowbound, gag-strewn *Mammals* (1962) was independently financed in Poland, shot with leftover stock and developed on the sly alongside official productions, rendering it officially cinema non grata in Poland, where filmmakers were required to produce production receipts.

By the time Polanski finished *Mammals*, *Knife in the Water* was in the can. But that film's treatment by both government censors (who added expository dialogue that Polanski would ask international distributors not to subtitle) and local media (which attacked it on ideological grounds) indicated that, as he put it, “I wouldn't be making another film in Poland for a long time to come.” ☹





➔ Pleasence minces away, squealing, “I’m going home to Mummy and Daddy!” This makes the perfect moment for the threatening intrusion of a gruff, burly gangster on the run (Lionel Stander), who can’t conceal his amusement at his host’s appearance and pinches his cheek violently: “Little fairy!”

Transvestism is more central in *The Tenant*, where – playing the disturbed hero Trelkovsky, who identifies increasingly with the suicidal previous female tenant – Polanski dons a wig, flowery dress, high heels and heavy make-up for the final section of the film, with very unsettling effect. Like *Rosemary’s Baby*, its predecessor in the so-called ‘apartment trilogy’ (the first being 1965’s *Repulsion*), *The Tenant* dramatises the paranoid sense of neighbours as a malign audience, voyeuristically watching, judging disgustedly and wishing one no good. Arrays of cold, hostile faces – like the one in the nightmare that opens Fellini’s *8½* – are a spectacle of which Polanski feels, and makes us feel, the horrifying power. The transgressive thrill of women’s clothing crops up again in Polanski’s latest, a short film called *A Therapy* made for Prada, in which Ben Kingsley’s wordless psychoanalyst, bored by spoilt, rich client Helena Bonham Carter’s monologue, grows distracted by her elegant fur-collared coat, finally sneaking behind her back to try it on, with a twirl and a thrilled simper.

### THE HEAD IN THE HANDBAG

“Most people never have to face the fact that at the right time and the right place, they’re capable of anything,” says *Chinatown*’s Noah Cross. Perverse, polymorphous sexuality runs through Polanski’s oeuvre – from the voyeurism of *A Toothful Smile* (1957) to the droll, cruel sadomasochism of *Bitter Moon* (1992) or the devilish seductress in *The Ninth Gate* (1999). Rape – or hideous fantasies of it – figures in *Repulsion*, *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Macbeth* (1971) – as well as in the post-exile *Tess* (1979). In *Death and the Maiden* (1994), we see Sigourney Weaver stuffing her panties into Ben Kingsley’s mouth to keep him quiet as she exacts her revenge for his alleged rape and torture of her. At the other pole from sexual excess lies repression – most notably in *Repulsion* (1965). When Catherine Deneuve is kissed by her would-be boyfriend in his car, she rushes upstairs and scours her mouth to cleanse herself; but in another scene she finds her sister’s

sex-soiled nightie on the floor and, about to put it in the bin, hesitates, then buries her face in it – before rushing to the toilet to puke. Polanski is attuned to what Dickens called the attraction of repulsion, though his 2005 *Oliver Twist* is disappointingly bland – one hoped for a stylistic daring to match Dickens’s own.

Physical objects – and especially food – seem to loom larger and often more nauseously in Polanski than they do for many other directors. The fruit cobbler offered to the bourgeois guests in *Carnage* (2011) seems to have turned – it precipitates the most beautifully staged vomiting scene and aftermath the cinema has seen, in the midst of a genteel drawing-room, where Kate Winslet chunders over Jodie Foster’s treasured art books (“Oh, my God! My Kokoschka! Oh no!”). Deneuve’s disorder in *Repulsion* contaminates her relation to food: as she gradually falls apart, potatoes by the sink wither, wrinkle, sprout obscene tentacles; while, unforgettably, a slimy skinned rabbit on a plate festers and attracts flies (we glimpse its severed head in her handbag). The agency that permits diabolical insemination in *Rosemary’s Baby* is neighbour Ruth Gordon’s drugged chocolate mousse (pronounced “mouse” by her); “it has an undertaste,” complains Rosemary, before collapsing. In *Chinatown*, groceries signify the uncanny, the deathly. To quote the script: “Gittes sees something down the hall, under the legs of a telephone table. Gittes moves toward it. It is grotesque. When he gets closer he can see it’s a wilted head of lettuce. Just inside the kitchen some radishes and onions lie on the linoleum.” In the kitchen lies the corpse of Ida Sessions. “Ice cream has melted around her. Her eyes are open, a stream of ants is moving across the ice cream and into her mouth.” (Time, perhaps, to mention the influence of Buñuel.)

All this thematic material, rich as it is – as well as influential on Lynch and Tim Burton, among so many others – would mean very much less without the cool, ironic sobriety of Polanski’s composition, narrative pacing, rhythms of montage and rigorous artistic conscience. In these masterful films the grotesque really registers – disturbs, concentrates, evokes our sense that something is wrong, with a touch that is magnificently right, a source of pleasure as well as unease.



A season of Polanski’s films plays throughout January and February at BFI Southbank, London

*All this unsettling material would mean much less without the cool, ironic sobriety of Polanski’s pacing, montage and compositions*

### DOMESTIC PECULIARITIES

The home lives on show in ‘Cul-de-sac’, left, and ‘Repulsion’, right, veer between the cute, the queasy and the repellent



# SCRAPING THE VARNISH

*Polanski's collaboration with Kenneth Tynan on his 1971 adaptation of 'Macbeth' was a meeting of iconoclastic minds*

**By Charles Barr**

For 30 years, up to *Bitter Moon* in 1992, Polanski regularly wrote his scripts in collaboration with Gérard Brach, whom he had met in Paris in the early 1960s; they share credit on all but one of the European productions that followed *Knife in the Water*. Like most film writers, Brach kept a low profile, leaving Polanski to make the headlines – often spectacular ones – both on the film pages and beyond. The odd film out is *Macbeth*, for which Polanski enlisted a collaborator as famous (or notorious) at the time as he was: Kenneth Tynan – theatre critic, impresario and celebrity journalist.

Ahead of the film's release, Tynan wrote for *Esquire* a profile of Polanski, combined with a production diary. In his collected writings, he changed the title of the piece from 'The Polish Imposition' to 'Magnetic Pole'. Polanski clearly felt a reciprocal magnetic attraction. "Each morning saw me champing at the bit for Tynan to arrive and our daily stint to begin," he wrote in his book *Roman by Polanski*. "His eccentric taste in clothes, especially his off-white suits and broad pink ties, never failed to astound me. I was even more impressed by his encyclopedic knowledge of Shakespeare... Tynan and I agreed on almost every point."

Tynan died in 1980, leaving the kind of legacy that inevitably fades before long – writings that for all their quality are very much tied to their moment: diaries, letters, journalism. But at the time of *Macbeth* he was a flamboyant public figure. He had moved from being outspoken drama critic of *The Observer* to the role of 'literary manager' at the new National Theatre (1963); he had been the first person to utter the word 'fuck' on British Television (1965); and he had recently devised the erotic 'nude revue' *Oh! Calcutta!*, which drew big audiences in London and New York (1969). On all three counts, he scandalised conservative opinion; at the National, he had argued publicly for the staging of the play *Soldiers* by Rolf Hochhuth, which was felt to denigrate the memory of Winston Churchill.

For Polanski, the murder of his wife Sharon Tate in Hollywood by the Manson gang during his own absence in Europe – and at a late stage of her first pregnancy – was still a horrific recent memory. Sympathy for his grief was swamped, in the popular



**Partners in provocation: Polanski, centre, with Kenneth Tynan and Kathleen Tynan**

press, by the suggestion that he and his entourage had somehow brought it on themselves by their hedonistic lifestyle. *Macbeth* was his first move back to work.

It was thus predictable that the Tynan-Polanski collaboration would attract interest, sometimes derision, especially since the finance was coming – as a last resort – from *Playboy* magazine, then at the height of its own notoriety. Here were two confident figures from the heart of the new 1960s permissiveness, committed both in theory and in practice to sexual freedom, seeming to contaminate Shakespeare by their touch, while working in collusion with a magazine best known for its monthly display of nude women as centrefolds. Commentators noted that preview audiences for the film laughed out loud when the initial *Playboy* credit appeared on screen.

And yet the film itself transcends this gossipy context. Polanski claimed that the scene of the slaughter of Macduff's wife and children (during Macduff's absence in England) drew on his own memory of Gestapo violence in Poland; Tynan made

the more obvious link to Manson; but for an audience without knowledge of either, the scene has intense power. The nudity of Lady Macbeth as she sleepwalks owes nothing to *Playboy* or *Oh! Calcutta!*, but is justified on its own terms, and unsensational. The writings of both men testify to the seriousness of the project at the successive stages of planning, scripting and shooting – in gruelling conditions in a Welsh winter.

In an early letter to Polanski, Tynan stressed the need to cast fresh young actors in the lead parts in *Macbeth*. Traditionally, he wrote, "English actors approach this part with so many preconceptions that you have to scrape them off like removing layers of varnish from an old master." This de-varnishing is exactly what the film achieves, both through casting (Jon Finch as Macbeth; Francesca Annis as Lady Macbeth; Martin Shaw as Banquo) and in other ways which there is no space to explore here. The metaphor can be extended: the press of the time daubed the film with distracting graffiti, which in the decades since has worn off, so that we can see it for what is.

According to Tynan, "I'd expected that I would be mainly concerned with the verbal aspect of the script and Roman with the visuals. But not at all: he knows the text inside out, and many of the staging ideas are coming from me." They were clearly a good and creative team. But the film's commercial failure made it easier for Polanski to return to Gérard Brach, and for Tynan to turn his back on screenwriting. *Macbeth* would remain his only film credit apart from the excellent 1958 Ealing production *Nowhere to Go*, again co-scripted with its director (in that case, Seth Holt). It could easily have been different. ☹

**i Polanski's 'Macbeth' screens on 15 & 19 January at BFI Southbank, London**



**Jon Finch and Francesca Annis in 'Macbeth'**



# BOOM AND BUST

Lenny Abrahamson's two critically fêted films 'Adam & Paul' and 'Garage' examined the underside of Irish society. But 'What Richard Did', the director's latest, sees him switch his attention to Dublin's stockbroker belt to reflect on the fate of the Celtic Tiger

By Trevor Johnston



**Films achieving something** approaching universal resonance often do so within a frame that seems intractably specific or regional. In recent British terms, you'd put the likes of, say, *This Is England* (2006), *Fish Tank* (2009) or *Neds* (2010) into that category, and the same would also doubtless be true for a spectrum of celluloid-producing nations. Certainly, the notion holds good in the trio of films that Irish director Lenny Abrahamson has delivered in the past decade. His stories rooted in the Celtic Tiger's national melodrama of economic boom and bust explore what it's like to be on the outside looking in – or, indeed, in his newest release, the moral thriller *What Richard Did*, how it is to grow up at the very centre of things with everything yours to lose.

The settings are Dublin high and low or the sleepy Irish countryside, but the emotions of yearning and despair, self-questioning and anxiety belong to everyone, precisely calibrated in Abrahamson's increasingly mature manner. Sometimes naturalistic, sometimes rather more sculpted, his films always leave the audience seemingly free to draw their own conclusions – but to do so as if gently circumscribed by this late-blooming artist's barely perceptible guiding hand.

Now in his mid-forties, Dublin-born Abrahamson was already a few years past the 'young firebrand' tag when his scuzzy-feely debut *Adam & Paul* burst onto the festival circuit in 2004. The material, tracing the life-in-a-day of two bickering junkie pals cutting a swathe of miserable

frustration across the ostensibly thriving Irish capital, was certainly a hard sell; the attentive, non-judgmental treatment, however, brought out a vein of porter-black comedy pitched somewhere between Beckett and Laurel & Hardy, thus outlining the dignity and humanity of those precariously clinging to the margins.

Three years later came an even richer act of portraiture in *Garage*, where TV comic Pat Shortt's downright remarkable portrayal of a simple-minded small-town petrol-station attendant, both village mascot and social outcast, provided the alternately cheery and unsettling centre to a haunting assessment of the possibility of community, the limits of compassion and the unknowability of others. Delivered with even more formal poise than its street-level predecessor, it's the most original of Abrahamson's offerings to date, a work of true staying power that surely stands as the most significant Irish film of its decade.

At first glance, *What Richard Did* comes across as something of a tangential move. We're in what you'd call Dublin's stockbroker belt, the plush environs south of the city where future professionals spawn, go to school, play rugby and enjoy their first and second homes. It's the very heartland of the Celtic Tiger that was – and on this evidence fairly insulated from the fallout now, since sixth-form alpha male Richard (played by supremely assured newcomer Jack Reynor) looks very much like a young man on the conveyor-belt to prosperity. Until, that





is, his bristling resentment of his girlfriend's ex leads to a late-night fracas that changes everything, transforming his perceptions of himself and his relationship to the world around him. The party is definitely over, as responsibility dawns, the narrative of the film seemingly echoing the country's own cold-light-of-day experience in recent years.

"That shape certainly exists in the film, and we knew it would be picked up on," says Abrahamson himself, validating this state-of-a-nation reading via Skype from his Dublin home, where he's been recuperating in bed from a nasty bout of flu. "Putting it crudely, Richard thinks too highly of himself, and we as a nation went through a period of being really pleased with ourselves in a very unpleasant way. With Richard, in the first half of the film, his world is full of narratives – of his own future, his place in the group, his relationship with his parents. In the second half, those markers have gone. He's faced by a series of present-tense encounters with places and people and choices he probably knows he's never going to be able to make. Those are precisely the reasons which led me to make the film."

For Irish viewers, there's a bit of history here, since Abrahamson's film takes its general outline and some character cues from Kevin Power's zeitgeist novel *Bad Day at Blackrock*, itself a fictionalisation of a high-profile murder case from 2000, in which 18-year-old Brian Murphy was kicked to death outside a Dublin nightclub

– a crime for which three former pupils of the exclusive Blackrock College later stood trial. *What Richard Did* explores the very same milieu; a workshopping period with the youthful cast and screenwriter Malcolm Campbell's keen ear for dialogue evidently helped lay out a convincing landscape of boozing, cruising, bonhomie and hormonal tensions as the lads ease from one weekend to another... before what happens happens. But given the imprint (however faint) of those still-raw real-life events on the film – or indeed the familiar cautionary contours of youth-gone-wrong parables for audiences to whom the name Blackrock still conjures up a 1954 thriller starring a one-armed Spencer Tracy – was Abrahamson concerned about sustaining viewer empathy past the story's fateful central pivot?

"Actually, I don't think it's the director's job to make the audience feel anything," he says, shifting against his pillows and moving his laptop to afford an eyeful of some rather challenging bedroom wallpaper. "In my work so far, I've just tried to be truthful, then allow the audience to encounter that truth, and trust that that in itself is a compelling experience. I wanted it to be completely credible that a young man in these circumstances might do what he did, and there had to be no uncertainty about that, or his culpability. The challenge for me was that the viewer's experience of him wouldn't be finished at that point, which meant I had to ensure they'd continue to wrestle with him, to explore and

**DOUBTFUL PROSPECT**  
The life of a middle-class Irish alpha male (Jack Reynor, all pics) falls apart in 'What Richard Did', the third feature from writer-director Lenny Abrahamson, opposite below



respond to him in a fluid way in the second half of the film.”

The achievement of *What Richard Did* is that it does just as Abrahamson says, finding a shape that's flexible enough to move between bustling ensemble, intimate two-hander and thoughtful solo modes. It's naturalistic enough to persuade us we're watching real kids, yet constructed in a manner that influences our responses while seeming to leave interpretation tantalisingly open. Since it appears to lack the audible ker-chunk of narrative buttons being pushed that dogs so many British films on a similar fairly modest budgetary scale, the film certainly feels more broadly European than most offerings from these islands. But while Abrahamson's thematic interest in individual moral responsibility shows some overlap with the terrain explored by the Dardennes and Haneke, he shows a particular skill here (which those particular masters, arguably, occasionally lack) for nimbly avoiding over-obvious point-scoring. Instead – with an ominous Steadicam track here, a lens flare there, and unsettling interjections from Stephen Rennicks's coolly pulsing score – his formal control is subtle, trusting the audience to draw its own conclusions.

“I do feel there's a development in my craft,” he says, “in part because with every film I make I feel more comfortable on set – even though this was a more complex undertaking than *Garage*, yet we actually had less time and money. But it's not that I set out to consciously stamp my style on the film – it's actually important for me that the thing isn't finished when I go to make it. I find there's a real energy in trying to uncover something, and for me the audience can feel that at work in the finished film. I mean, I was dismayed when I read an interview with Haneke – some of whose films I love, by the way – where he said that essentially his films remained unchanged from script to screen. I really feel there's a terrible sterility in that.”

Such words indicate Abrahamson's genuine confidence in his métier. But when you consider that it's over 20 years since his very first short played at Oberhausen in 1992, the distance between then and now underlines how far both he himself and the Irish film industry have come in that time. “That year there was one other short made in Ireland, and no features,” he recalls. “It sort of explains why I went off to Stanford to continue studying philosophy. I think I'd decided to be a filmmaker, but it was hard to admit it to myself, given the situation for film in Ireland at that point. It was like saying you wanted to be an astronaut, or circumnavigate the globe in a dinghy.”

Abrahamson came home from the US without completing his postgraduate degree, and spent the ten years before *Adam & Paul* honing his technique in advertising. During that period, the reconstituted Irish Film Board created the investment structures that allowed Dublin production companies to engineer a resurgence in celluloid activity, often in tandem with partners from the UK or further abroad. Abrahamson has known his producer Ed Guiney since their undergraduate days at Trinity College Dublin, and Guiney's Element Pictures – while generating projects with the likes of Paolo Sorrentino, Jerzy Skolimowski and Oliver Hirschbiegel – has given Abrahamson the time and support to generate his own mini-slate of projects.



**IN THE MARGINS**  
Abrahamson built his reputation on his first two features: 'Adam & Paul', top, and 'Garage', below, with Anne-Marie Duff, centre, and Pat Shortt, right

*I'd decided to be a filmmaker, but given the situation in Ireland at that point, it was like saying you wanted to be an astronaut*

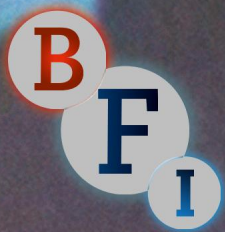
These include the tantalising prospect of *Frank*, the movie he's about to start shooting in Ireland, the UK and New Mexico, starring Michael Fassbender as an avant-garde musician who keeps the world at bay by sporting a large papier-mâché head. Inspired by co-writer Jon Ronson's days in the backing band for 1980s pop's cultiest outsider Frank Sidebottom, it's described by Abrahamson as “a downbeat comedy road movie, and a meditation on creativity and the desire to be extraordinary”. Promising to touch on his love of bleak Scandinavian humour – as well as the US indie legacy from *Down by Law* to the revelatory muso-doc *The Devil and Daniel Johnston* – *Frank* could be the breakthrough to extend Abrahamson's profile beyond consistent critical acclaim, international festival support and strong numbers at the Irish box office. The man himself certainly contends that he's ready to stretch his ambitions further afield.

“For the first two films I was conscious of being rooted in the Irish soil, but less so with *What Richard Did*, which was just something which came up that I wanted to do,” he says. “Very consciously, though, I've been developing projects which take place out of Ireland. I'm glad I didn't go to the States to make big films after doing one small, critically well-received one here, because you end up making awful stuff. I've taken my time – maybe too much time – but I now feel solid enough, old enough, seasoned enough to go for something that little bit larger without being swamped by it.”

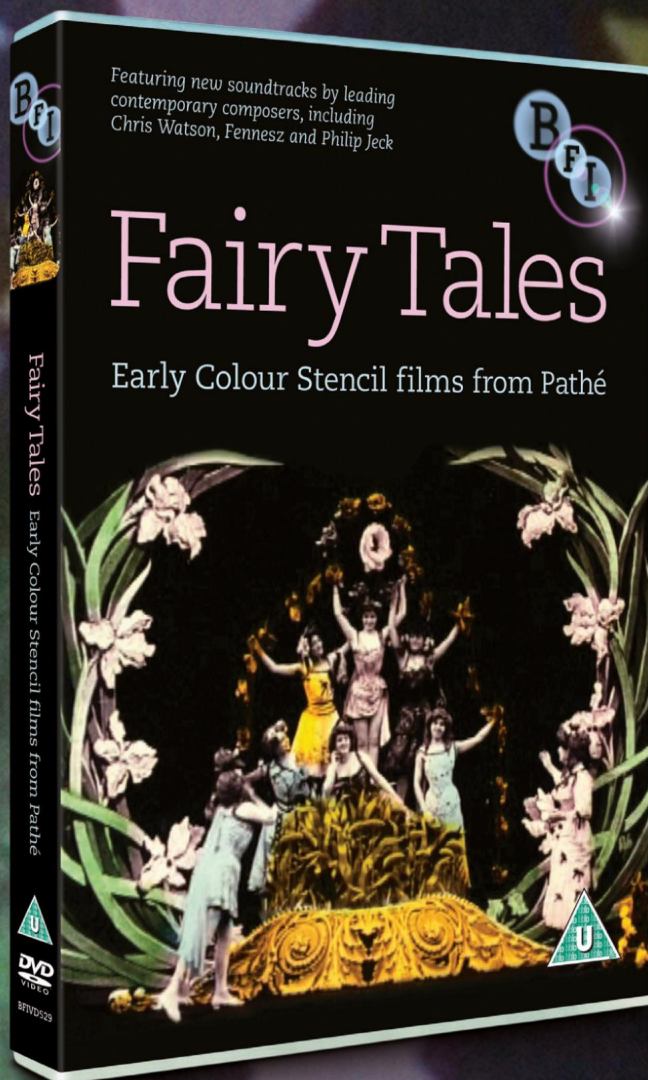


**'What Richard Did' is released in the UK on 11 January, and is reviewed on page 109**





# FILMS OF WONDER



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# MISTER FREEDOM

Steven Spielberg's *'Lincoln'*, the story of the president's struggle to pass the abolition of slavery before the end of the Civil War, has attracted praise in the US – and criticism for its white perspective. But how does the film – the director's first biopic – fit into the Spielberg oeuvre

By Graham Fuller



**ELDER STATESMAN**  
Steven Spielberg, above, has finally realised his long-cherished ambition to make a film about Abraham Lincoln, played here by Daniel Day-Lewis, opposite

Always an objectionable term in light of its pejorative lilt, 'Spielbergian' was coined – in the era of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* and the less important Spielberg-produced *Poltergeist*, *The Twilight Zone* and *The Goonies* (collectively 1977-85) – to connote the childlike sense of awe and the belief in suburban family values (often minus the paternal influence) that those films espoused. Varying in quality, the Indiana Jones and *Jurassic Park* movies, *Hook* (1991), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), *War of the Worlds* (2005), *The Adventures of Tintin* and *War Horse* (both 2011) are identifiably the work of the same enthralling – and enthralled – entertainer.

However, there are sides to Spielberg that render 'Spielbergian' problematic, if not obsolete (for its meaning solidified around his benevolent, family-friendly spectacles). One is the young maker of the white-knuckle rides *Duel* (1971) and *Jaws* (1975). Another is the maker of films that defy simple analysis, such as *Minority Report* (2002), *Catch Me If You Can* (2002) and *The Terminal* (2004), even if they can be categorised generically. There is the Spielberg fascinated by World War II and the 'Greatest Generation': as the director of *1941* (1979), *Empire of the Sun* (1987) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and as a producer on HBO's *Band of Brothers* (2001) and Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (both 2006).

Finally, there is the sociopolitical Spielberg who made

*The Color Purple* (1985), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Amistad* (1997), *Munich* (2005) and now *Lincoln* – five urgent dramas oriented around ethno-religious or racial persecution. *Schindler's List* and *Munich*, of course, are about Jewish experience, dealing respectively with the Holocaust and the hunt for the killers of the 11 Israeli athletes murdered at the 1972 Olympics. *The Color Purple*, *Amistad* and *Lincoln* address – indirectly in the case of the new film – the plight of blacks in America; together they comprise the only fictional trilogy, however loose it may be, made by a non-black Hollywood director on that subject. Raising the issue of Jewish empathy for America's slaves, J. Hoberman persuasively argued in *Tablet Magazine* that Spielberg's bearded Great Emancipator in *Lincoln* is a 19th-century Moses, if not technically a Jew.


*Lincoln* was critically applauded on its release in America last November, but also elicited a storm of protest, particularly in the blogosphere, about the movie it should have been. One of the chief complaints concerned Spielberg's decision to show the concluding stages of the abolition movement from the perspective of Abraham Lincoln (Daniel Day-Lewis) rather than from that of, say, Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave who became the abolition movement's greatest orator. In a *New York Times* op-ed piece, historian Kate Masur – author of *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the*









 *Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C.* – praised the first dialogue scene of *Lincoln*, in which two black soldiers talk with the president about their combat experiences. The feistier of them is an educated corporal, probably a free-born New Englander, who raises the issue of unequal promotions and pay in the Union Army, and the likelihood that blacks won't get the vote for a hundred years. He then throws down a gauntlet to Lincoln by quoting back to him the end of the Gettysburg Address.

Despite her admiration for the scene – crucial in framing the film's conflict between the imperatives of ending slavery and establishing racial equality (a deterrent for Democrats in the House of Representatives who might otherwise have supported abolition) – Masur notes that it's "disappointing that in a movie devoted to emphasizing the abolition of slavery in the United States, African-American characters do almost nothing but passively wait for the white men to liberate them". Similar complaints were made about Spielberg's decision to make a Holocaust film from the perspective of Oskar Schindler, an ethnic German, and to make the hero of *Amistad* the former president John Quincy Adams – like Lincoln an abolitionist, but a white man. The latter film, I would contend, derives its power less from the rhetoric of Adams (played by Anthony Hopkins) than from its brutal evocation of the slave experience – particularly through Djimon Hounsou's portrayal of the furious, tearful Cinque, who has been ripped away from his wife and child in Africa and manacled in the hold of the eponymous Spanish slaver.

At least such accusations could not be levelled at *The Color Purple*. Showing as it does the enslavement of a black woman, Celie, by a black man, Albert Johnson, who is the inheritor of the slaveholder tradition but also pathologically cruel, it remains one of Spielberg's most complicated movies, notwithstanding the forced sentiment of Albert's redemption. That Celie emancipates herself from her husband recommends it as a feminist work rather than one about race.

It is shameful that there has never been a Douglass biopic, and his absence from *Lincoln* is eyebrow-raising. The film could have gone further, as Masur suggests, in showing that the president was friendlier in his relations with African-Americans, Douglass among them, than is implied in the clumsy conversation he has with his wife's dressmaker and confidante Elizabeth Keckley (Gloria Reuben), an activist who wrote of her 30 years as a slave and four as a White House insider. ("I don't know you, any of you," Lincoln says to her in the film.) The portrayal of Lincoln's black activist manservant William Slade (Stephen Henderson), who smiles on him as he traipses off to Ford's Theatre, is stereotypically benign.

#### THE AMENDMENT

*Lincoln* may be guilty of the sin of racial omission, but as a film about the man who engineered the passage of the slavery-abolishing 13th Amendment in January 1865, and the political process that entailed, it is an immersive experience – one that foregrounds chewy debate and hectic lobbying over pictorialism. Given the sombreness of the time, it benefits greatly from being one of Spielberg's darkest and stillest movies. Many of the interior scenes were shot in chiaroscuro by Janusz Kaminski, the Polish cinematographer who has shot a dozen films for



**IDENTITY POLITICS**  
Spielberg's latest follows four earlier films dealing with racial persecution, from the top: 'The Color Purple,' 'Amistad,' 'Munich' and 'Schindler's List'



*Complaints were made about Spielberg's decision to make the former president John Quincy Adams the hero of 'Amistad'*







the director since their first collaboration on *Schindler's List*. His silhouetting of Lincoln in one of his troubling confrontations with his unstable wife Mary (Sally Field) – just the edge of her face visible in the gloom of their bedroom – suggests the influence of the 19th-century artist Eastman Johnson, who imagined the boy Lincoln in one of his canvases and also painted slave life. The streets and yards in the capital and in Petersburg, Virginia are grey, dirty, desolate. Scenes of carnage inevitably recall the American Civil War photography of Mathew Brady.

Hired by Spielberg to write the script, the playwright Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*, the screenplay of *Munich*) read most of the 400 books he collected about the 16th US president – drawing heavily on Doris Kearns Goodwin's 916-page *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* – and conducted copious original research. After six years, he turned in a 500-page screenplay, enough for an eight-part miniseries. Spielberg told Kushner the movie he wanted to make would be based on the 80-page section in the script that dealt with Lincoln's astute manipulation of the political machinery to force through the House of Representatives the 13th Amendment to the Constitution – irrevocably outlawing slavery and involuntary servitude – in the dying days of the Civil War.

Kushner rebuilt the script from that point. It merges two political struggles. One is between the Republicans, then America's progressive party, and the non-reformist House Democrats, who believe 'negroes' are unequal to the white race and that abolition will prolong the war. The other is between Lincoln's moderate Republicans, who urge the passing of the amendment before the coming peace (lest the readmission of the Southern states into the Union block abolition), and the radical Republicans who – led by the fearsome abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens (Tommy Lee Jones) – will seek immediate black enfranchisement. (In D.W. Griffith's 1915 epic racist screed *The Birth of a Nation*, the vituperative Stevens was portrayed by Ralph Lewis as "Austin Stoneman", the dupe of his cunning mulatto housekeeper; Lionel Barrymore's Stevens was the vengeful villain of William Dieterle's 1942 *Tennessee Johnson*.)

Because Spielberg and Kushner dwell on politics in action, some reviewers dismissed the idea that it is a Lincoln biopic. It is less obviously so than Griffith's cradle-

to-the-grave *Abraham Lincoln* (1930), partially an apology for the racist outrages of *The Birth of a Nation*, or the post-New Deal pair, John Ford's folksy *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939) and John Cromwell's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940) – the latter of which, based on Robert E. Sherwood's play, delves into Lincoln's melancholia and pre-presidential indecisiveness.

Yet if we allow that *Lincoln* delivers the life in the brief historical moment, it is a biopic. Not only does it deal with Lincoln's tempestuous family life – particularly in regard to Mary and their eldest son Robert (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), whose decision to enlist in the Union Army mortifies his mother – it also sketches in telling details of Lincoln's earlier life. He recounts, for example, how he had an unhappy relationship with his father, who was not kind, he says, but when it came to abolition was blessed with a rough moral integrity.

Though the film predictably avoids engaging with racist statements that Lincoln made – notably in a speech he gave in Charleston, Illinois in 1858 – it does show him, in the first cabinet scene, grappling with the forces set in motion by his 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, a measure he felt was demanded by the war. He admits that he was concerned about its constitutionality and worries about its legality after the war, but then spins off into the (mostly true) tale of an old woman he defended early in his career as a lawyer on the Eighth Illinois Judicial Circuit. She had killed her older husband, a known wife-beater. During a recess, she disappeared for good, Lincoln having told the thirsty woman "there was mighty good water in Tennessee." The story not only entertains Lincoln's cabinet members as it conjures up the spirit of the beardless young lawyer, but it leads him into his next point – that he needs their wholehearted support on the 13th Amendment. The arc of the scene describes Lincoln moving from uncertainty to conviction.

The president delegates the necessary dirty work of vote-buying to William H. Seward (a bristling David Strathairn), who before becoming Lincoln's loyal secretary of state had fought him for the Republican nomination in 1860. Seward in turn delegates it to three rascally lobbyists (James Spader, John Hawkes, Tim Blake Nelson), who use patronage and cash gifts to draw in the 20 votes needed. Jones's absurdly bewigged Stevens terrifies a timid Democrat into voting for

**QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE**  
'Lincoln' charts the president's wranglings with more radical abolitionists like Thaddeus Stevens (Tommy Lee Jones, right)



the amendment while holding out the carrot of an eventual Republican seat. The real Stevens wasn't referring to himself when he said, "The greatest measure of the nineteenth century was passed by corruption, aided and abetted by the purest man in America."

The president goes to work himself. Alone with Stevens in the White House kitchen during his second-term inauguration "shindy", Lincoln presses him not to push for black enfranchisement, coming up with a persuasive metaphor about the peril of pointing your moral compass "true north" if it leads you into a swamp. He leans on a pious Republican who despises slavery but fears what would befall the millions of freed slaves after emancipation. He even makes a nocturnal visit to the home of a Democrat who admits he is prejudiced against blacks because his brother has been killed in the war.

Although the issue of what's right is not at stake in these scenes (at least for the liberal 21st-century audience), the sophisticated and sometimes crude level of arguing, reasoning, encouraging and coercing that's brought to bear in the House debate, in secret meetings in offices high and low, in an alehouse and in the yard behind a derelict factory, makes for a rare kind of historical-polemical cinema. Its tension derives from explosive but sparing images from the ebbing war: the film opens with a montage of shots of non-white Union troops in a ferocious hand-to-hand fight at the 1864 Battle of Jenkins' Ferry (redolent of the openings of *Saving Private Ryan* and *Amistad*) and reaches a visual crescendo with the amphibious Union bombardment of Fort Fisher 16 days before the vote.

Lincoln's mournful tour of the corpse-strewn battlefield at Petersburg on 3 April 1865, two months after the passing of the amendment and a week before Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, is also somberly depicted, contextualising the necessity of abolition in the framework of the vast national tragedy. "It's either the amendment or this Confederate peace – you cannot have both," Seward warned Lincoln after he had sanctioned the old Jacksonian conservative Preston Blair (Hal Holbrook) to solicit peace commissioners from Jefferson Davis's Confederate government – but Lincoln knew that abolition must precede the end of the war.

### PRINCIPLED DISSEMBLER

At the film's heart is the most Lincolnian of Lincolns – Daniel Day-Lewis's canny, kindly commander-in-chief, who is confiding with his young male secretaries (to whom he poses philosophical questions about the reasons for existence in the middle of the night) and makes a point of asking invalided soldiers their names when he visits them in hospital. Addressing key issues, he speaks in humorous parables and sharp metaphors, the exact purport of which is sometimes lost on his listeners. He can also be a hammer, as when his cabinet urges him to leave the Constitution alone. "Shall we stop this bleeding? We must cure ourselves of slavery," he exhorts them in his reedy undertone, before wrathfully proclaiming: "The fate of human dignity is in our hands. Blood's been spilled to afford us this moment. Now, now, now!" He is, he reminds them, "the president of the United States, clothed in immense power", and the votes must be procured at all cost. Near the end, he tells Mary how much he would like to visit the Holy Land, but Day-Lewis never



**YOUNG MR LINCOLN**  
Alongside political machinations, 'Lincoln' also charts domestic problems involving the president's eldest son Robert (Joseph Gordon-Levitt, above)

allows him to become an American Jesus. He is hardly 'Honest Abe' either, but a principled dissembler, not above skulduggery if it is morally justified.

This Lincoln is a tender family man, who carries to bed and sits on his lap his 11-year-old, Tad (Gulliver Grath) – a boy with a Spielbergian taste for photographic images (daguerreotypes of slaves) and armoured creatures (beetles); but he's not above striking his eldest son Robert when he blurts out that his father fears his mother. He is loving towards his wife, though her indulged grief for their third son Willie – who in 1862 had followed their second son into the grave – tests his patience. Theirs is a fraught union; it's intimated that Mary can make Lincoln's life hell if she chooses.

Physically, Day-Lewis's performance is a thing of careworn arboreal beauty. Lincoln is a lank but bowed figure who trudges like a dotard along the White House's corridors, the husk of the rail-splitting buck played by Henry Fonda in *Young Mr. Lincoln*. When Lincoln meets General Grant (Jared Harris) outside a house in Petersburg after the Confederate defeat and the climactic fall of Richmond, 11 days before the assassination, Grant observes that Lincoln has aged ten years. "Some weariness has bit at my bones," the haggard president admits. Kushner may have had in mind a description of the president given by the Washington journalist Noah Brooks in the period leading up to Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. According to Goodwin, Brooks had noted how "Lincoln's appearance had 'grievously altered from the happy-faced Springfield lawyer' he had first met in 1856. 'His hair is grizzled, his gait is more stooping, his countenance sallow, and there is a sunken, deathly look about the large, cavernous eyes.'"

Day-Lewis's Lincoln first fits this description when, on the crucial January night the fleet attacks Fort Fisher, he suddenly booms out the start of an anecdote, rendering Secretary of War Edwin Stanton apoplectic. Because the story – about George Washington and a London aristocrat's privy – mocks the English, it aligns them with the South, and the just Northern cause with that of the Patriots and the Founding Fathers. If much of Spielberg's cinema is concerned with absent fathers – the vacuum into which he once poured the tropes and aura of Spielbergianism – *Lincoln* centres on a mythic father who made himself readily available to all his people.



'Lincoln' is released in the UK on 25 January, and is reviewed on page 101

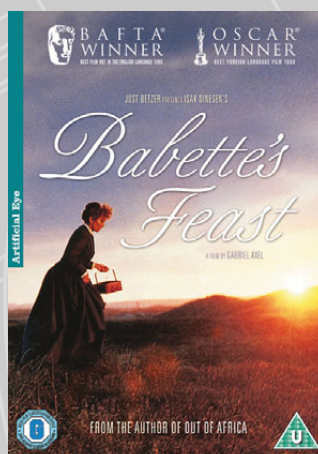




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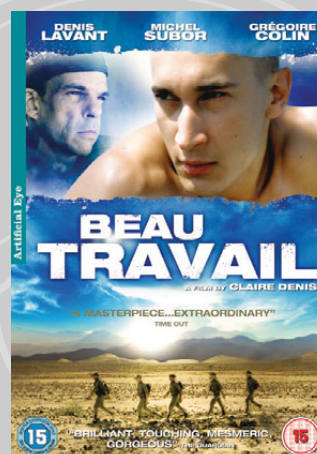
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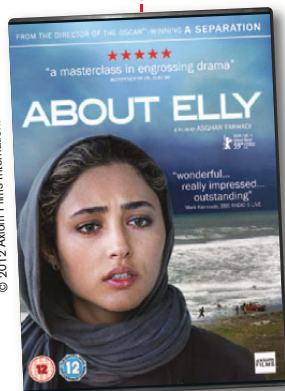
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# TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NOIR

The term *film noir* may have come to refer to a body of US films made between 1941 and 1958, but it also conjures up a potent blend of cinematic style and dark material that still inspires directors around the world, among them the most formidable names in Hollywood and in arthouse cinema: Nolan, Lynch, Campion, Mann, Ceylan... The dozen films below represent an attempt to gauge the essence of *noir* in the new century – a genre that allows filmmakers to push the envelope of narrative construction, while also addressing the themes that haunt us, from memory loss to compulsive violence to transgressive sexuality

By Nick James

In recent years, film directors as significant to our times as Christopher Nolan, David Lynch, Michael Mann, Jacques Audiard, David Fincher and Brian De Palma have all made regular, vivid use of the palette of moods that make up *film noir*. Yet before I started to look into *noir*'s survival as a tendency in 21st-century cinema, I would have said that its influence had faded. The dark, romantic blend of fatalism, desire, danger, fantasy and mistrust that had sparked off my own cinephilia when I spent much of the 1980s tracking down opportunities to see the definitive films of the 1940s and 50s seemed to have become only a fleeting and occasional part of my filmgoing life.

Certainly, the hoary figure of the hardboiled detective who "down these mean streets... must go", as Raymond Chandler had it, went out of fashion in Hollywood a while back. Hollywood narratives in the noughties – some key exceptions like *Bond* and *Batman* notwithstanding – were keen to offset the centrality of the existential loner, to prefer partnered protagonists or the shared responsibility of ensemble dynamics. In the globalised market, the moviegoing experience tried to offer customers more multiple viewpoints, a greater sense of community. Perhaps, also, it was decided that movies shouldn't try to compete in existential terms with the online games industry, where each individual gamer (or shooter) is truly responsible for their actions.

Hollywood had, in any case, become commercially allergic to mid-budget films of all kinds, including the many dark-themed, transgressive crime films that used to fall into this category. And of course, with big screens and digital technology allowing television to be much more cinematic, great television series, from *The Sopranos* to *Breaking Bad*, were stealing much of *film noir*'s thunder. So the suspicion lingered that only the vestiges of *noir* remained in cinema – that it had become merely one of the set patterns of the postmodern grab-bag of popular styles available.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Looking back over the last dozen years with the blinkers off, the *noir* legacy now seems central to the pleasure of this era of cinema. The argument I'm making is that the 12 films I've gathered below are in their way as much a fragmentary guide to the concerns of our times as the original *noirs* were to wartime and post-war America. Of course, 70-odd years after the first *noir* appeared, a filmmaker can't approach *noir*-ish material without a revivifying original angle. But that's what's so startling about these dozen films (and others I mention in passing): they are extraordinarily various hybrid forms bursting with fresh angles on old themes. In that sense few, if any, of my examples are pure, but then few films in the original canon contain all that *noir* allows.

Problems of definition arose as soon as French critic Nino Frank first used the term 'black film' in 1946, borrowing from the *Série noire* novels, and thereby mystifying the people who made those films. Even once the classic period was established, critically, as having lasted from John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) to Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), it was still sometimes hard to figure out when a gangster film or a police procedural or a heist movie or a psychological thriller stopped being just a familiar genre piece and could be toe-tagged as bona fide *film noir*. For, as Paul Schrader has it, "*film noir* is not a genre... It is not defined... by conventions of setting and conflict, but rather by the most subtle qualities of tone and mood." I'd cavil that those qualities were not always so subtle, but Schrader is otherwise dead-on.

As soon as you step outside the original canon – most of which is listed in Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward's *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style* – *noir* is wide-open

*The 12 films are as much a guide to the concerns of our times as the original noirs were to post-war America*

to category disputes. A new problem arrived with the first major spate of self-conscious, post-definition *noir* films, such as Alan J. Pakula's *Klute* (1971), Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973), Peter Yates's *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973), Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), Dick Richards's *Farewell, My Lovely* (1975) and Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* (1975). How do you draw a line between sincere tribute and kitsch parody in a form that has flaunted its pulpy, gaudy 'low' culture allegiances from the get-go? Thereafter, the handy tag 'neo-*noir*' separated the originals of 1941-58 from the endless numbers of films inspired by them. But, as a visit to the Wikipedia list of neo-*noirs* will confirm, that term has become virtually useless because it's so indiscriminate. Yet, for me, the list is also a sharp indication of *noir*'s discreet pre-eminence.

Combing through likely titles, I could have made claims for at least 50 *noir*-ish films made since 2000. To hone my selection criteria for a core dozen, I went for films whose use of *noir* moods seemed either formally inventive or apt about a contemporary concern. I also looked for new takes on the usual characteristics: hardboiled literary sources; tough, morally ambiguous protagonists; first-person (possibly unreliable) voiceover narration; flashbacks and dream sequences; subjective camera viewpoints; subversions of classical narrative; lush melancholic saxophones and strings; a femme fatale or two; elements of expressionist lighting; a grainy dystopian angle on urban life. As might have been expected, with such a disparate set of attributes, the inherent contradictions soon began to bubble like boiling tar.

Filmmakers today have to use *noir* carefully because so many of its stylistics are clichés. And there are other constraints. The theoretical writings around *noir* that helped make watching the films so delectable in the 1980s have made filmmakers more knowing in their depiction of the character archetypes, and that sometimes makes them too self-conscious. Some of *noir*'s darkest imaginings have been co-opted by the serial-killer genre – which may be why films like









➡ *Brick* and *Tell No One* find the shadows a less compelling metaphorical space.

Yet in the 12 films below, *noir* seems to have retained some of its original capability to act as a conduit and pressure-relief valve for the contradictions and hypocrisies of the day. That so many of the lead characters experience their sense of self being fragmented, merged, replaced or destroyed is a common *noir* trope, but 21st-century examples take the dissolution much further (which may itself indicate contemporary mistrust of the loner). The portrayal of fragile personalities in *Memento*, *Mulholland Dr*, *In the Cut* and *A History of Violence* parallels anxieties about the way we create and manage our personas through electronic media.

We've become used to screen violence as an aesthetic as well as a dramatic tool of cinema, but in the pulp extravagance of *Sin City* and the macho indulgences of *Drive* the conflict between violence-as-outrage and violence-as-pleasure is tested to an unnerving, revelatory degree. Despite the two *noirs* with female protagonists here (*In the Cut* and *Mulholland Dr*) women tend to be more readily shaped for the fatale stereotype than they were in the 1970s 'neo-noirs' – a problem that missing examples like *Baise-moi* (2000) or *Miss Bala* (2011) wouldn't have solved. Smaller concerns – such as the creative convergence of film and television compellingly evidenced in *Mulholland Dr* and *Red Riding*, or the way that films like *Collateral* use the new digital cameras to better capture how we see the city at night, or the sense given by *Sin City* that all cinema may be heading towards animation – provide further evidence of *noir*'s adaptability.

If the more documentary aspects of crime in the city have been left to the likes of *The Wire*, the feeling remains that at the extremes of the category, a high-school *noir* spoof like *Brick* can engage our attention to a real-life setting almost as well as a terrifying, poetic look into institutional child murder like *Red Riding*. Finally (and this was one of the aspects that intrigued me most when I set out) *noir* has again become a strong, if oblique, influence on international art cinema – as it once was on Godard, Melville, Fassbinder and Bertolucci, to name but four. As we shall see in the entry on *Three Monkeys*, some of the most decisive films in international art cinema made in the last dozen years can be said to owe *noir* a debt.

I can't claim that this collection is in any way definitive. One of the pleasures of *noir* is that everyone has their own slightly different feeling for it. I'm certain that strong cases can be made for missing films – even a completely different 12. I'm conscious, for instance, that I've found no place for the class-mobility semi-*noirs* such as *Match Point* (2005) or the Russian *Elena* (2011). But what I hope my selection establishes is that 21st-century *noir* is more than just the outer circle of the blast pattern of a cultural explosion that happened a lifetime ago. The fact that there's only one pastiche period piece here (*The Black Dahlia*) shows that *noir* may have finally shrugged off its corny Bogart-in-a-raincoat image. If we had to choose new poster boys and girls for *noir*, the habitual criminals



Shifting identities: Carrie-Anne Moss and Guy Pearce in 'Memento'

would be Mark Ruffalo (see *In the Cut*) and Scarlett Johansson (*The Black Dahlia*, *Match Point*). But if you're seeking the contemporary equivalent of Bogart's cool, then for better or worse Ryan Gosling (pictured on p.57) – a man who down these mean street must drive – has it. He's not so much out of the past as in a less lonely place.

### 1. Loss of Self: 'Memento'

(Christopher Nolan, 2000)

*Noirs* favour haunted memory and the dream-state, so it's no surprise that so many begin with the protagonist in bed. After a killing shown in reverse, we find Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) on a bed in the traditional *noir* circumstance of the lone male explaining himself in voiceover, except that Shelby can't do that very well because he suffers from anterograde amnesia, the inability to form new memories – a dilemma of some contemporary resonance. The prevalence of Alzheimer's disease means that to lose one's memory – a common *noir* event – is now a universal dread, and part of *Memento*'s fascination comes from watching how Shelby copes with his lack of knowledge or understanding in an action context.

While we're encouraged to sympathise with his vulnerability and essential isolation, the tone of the film isn't sombre or mournful – it's outgoing, almost jaunty. Shelby is a vigorous, fidgety person. It's noticeable that everywhere the sunshine seems too bright, as if director Christopher Nolan is making light the opposite of enlightenment. Shelby gears himself up for each new day by rehearsing certain drills, like a child refining his persona for school. He has a system of where to put

*The prevalence of Alzheimer's disease means that to lose one's memory – a common noir event – is now a universal dread*

things and how to interpret the instructions he's left for himself the day before. This activity sometimes feels like a critique of the dependent way we run our lives via electronic media. He will only talk to people face to face, because he needs to look into their eyes to see if they're telling the truth. He takes polaroids and tattoos the most important messages on his own body, a corporeal authentic stance that also feels very noughties (text on the body being a major recent preoccupation of Western artists). But we buy Nolan's whole outlandish conceit, I would argue, because the *noir* crime-film conventions ease us into it.

As soon as Shelby has described his world and we know there's a revenge motive – someone killed his wife – we're comfortable enough to cope with the film's most significant challenge: that the story unfolds in a dual but contrary manner, with colour sequences that succeed each other by going backwards in time, and black-and-white sequences that go forward. Nolan has shown a consistent interest in uncertain identities in *noir*-ish situations (in *Insomnia*, 2002, and *The Dark Knight*, 2008, for instance), and having a narrative fold back on its storyline is, of course, a key *noir* trait; but reverse chronology is a more extreme strategy. It's curious that several films with a similar structure were made around the same time – Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997), Lee Changdong's *Peppermint Candy* (1999), Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (2002), François Ozon's *5x2* (2004) and a subplot of Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). Only one of those is particularly *noir*-ish: *Irreversible*, with its notoriously graphic and lengthy underpass rape of Alex (Monica Bellucci), which is shot and lit much like a *noir*, with Bellucci dressed as if she were acting in one.

What makes *Memento* significant in the canon is that it's all about the dissolution of the central personality – the one through whom we experience the film; what makes it radical is that the dissolution has already



happened before we meet him. So we watch the piecing back together of a man who is a ghost to himself, who remains innocent of the memory of his doings, even as we learn who he is through what he's done – in a way that he, despite being the first-person narrator, can never know. In that sense, it couldn't be more postmodern.

## 2. In Every Dream a Nightmare:

**'Mulholland Dr'** (David Lynch, 2001)

Much of David Lynch's career has been dedicated to extending the more unnerving effects of the *noir* palette on viewers' psyches, but *Mulholland Dr* is probably his most potent variation on *noir* themes – specifically, here, the career terror lurking beneath Hollywood's bright facade. Like *Memento* it centres on memory loss, but there's an excess of recall and imaginings here that's almost the opposite of the repetition and reductiveness of Nolan's film.

After the pure fun of the montaged jitterbug opening sequence, we see an image that couldn't be more *noir*: a shiny black limo crawling through the darkness of Mulholland Drive, high above Los Angeles, its red tail lights like eyes peering from the stygian gloom. The unnamed glamorous woman (Laura Elena Harring) in the back seat is every inch a classic femme fatale, but she's in danger. "What are you doing? We don't stop here," she asks as the driver and his partner turn with guns in their hands. Then a carful of joyriding teens collides with them and our heroine is the only survivor – car-crash survival being a Lynchian mini-theme. Now she's suffering from amnesia as she staggers downhill (crossing Sunset Boulevard en route).

It's not her psyche the film is interested in, however, but that of Betty Elms (Naomi



**'In the Cut'**

Watts), the ingenue actress whose apartment our amnesiac slips into. When Betty asks the stranger for her name, she calls herself Rita after Rita Hayworth (she's just seen a poster of *Gilda* on the wall). As a particular kind of femme fatale, 'Rita' is meant to be unfathomable, but Betty, taking on the investigator role, forces the pace on trying to find out her identity. Since she's a button-bright goody-two-shoes, this is perhaps the most prominent inversion in the film of *noir* typology. It allows Lynch to pair Rita's classic vamp and Betty's cross between Doris Day and a Hitchcockian ice queen in a lesbian tryst that distracts us from the notional goal but offers motivation for the film's extraordinary coda, when the upbeat Betty 'becomes' the bitter Diane Selwyn and 'Rita', famous actress Camilla. The relationship between them now mirrors the likes of *All About Eve* and *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* – their transformations cued by the opening of a mysterious blue box.

Few *noir* films can match Lynch's ability to make a seemingly super-ordinary environment seethe with uncanny dread. Since we know that the film was constructed out of the vestiges

of a pilot for a TV series that never happened, with the coda drawn from some extra scenes added a year later, we accept the undeveloped nuances that put full comprehension beyond reach. The same applies to the ambiguity around identity, which can be read several ways. You can argue, for instance, that Betty/Diane more or less behaves like a male protagonist, thereby undermining in turn the disruption of thriller norms the film seems to achieve – but then the identity-merging and swapping that occurs puts quicksand under that view too. In the sense that you're never altogether sure if you're watching a dream or not, *Mulholland Dr* has some affinity with Scorsese's near-*noir* *Shutter Island* (2009) – though the latter film, inevitably, is more uptight in its presentation.

## 3. Sex and the City: 'In the Cut'

(Jane Campion, 2003)

This distinctive sexual take on *noir* comes from combined female voices – those of author Susanna Moore and director Jane Campion. Moore's 'erotic mystery thriller', published in 1996, shocked many by having its protagonist Frannie – a college professor teaching writing to ghetto kids – butchered at the end by the serial killer. Campion's film, made in collaboration with Moore, goes for a more redemptive ending, but otherwise confronts the erotic allure of danger for Frannie (Meg Ryan) head on. The professor hangs out in places where she can pick up ghetto lingo for a book she's publishing. When visiting a seedy bar with a student, she accidentally witnesses a woman with long blue fingernails giving a man a blow job; his face is in shadow, but she sees he has a number and a playing-card spade tattooed on his wrist. Later, a man lurking on the staircase of her apartment building turns out to be Detective Malloy (Mark Ruffalo), investigating the death of a woman who we will discover had long blue fingernails.

Set up as an emotionally distant character – at least in comparison with her more instinctive and vulnerable flatmate Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh) – Frannie nevertheless seems physically fragile and socially clumsy. Meg Ryan – playing against her romcom persona – gives Frannie a New York kind of quirky curiosity, so she's almost like a less kooky Woody Allen heroine, but it's also intriguing to imagine what the film would have been like had producer Nicole Kidman played the part, as originally intended. (She backed out, saying she couldn't commit to something this emotional while in the throes of divorcing Tom Cruise.)

Not that Ryan holds back in the raunchy sex scenes with the very able Malloy, in which she seems to lose herself. After being suddenly ignored by him when his cop partner shows up, and then being mugged on the street in the rain because she had to walk home alone, Frannie nonetheless remains drawn to a policeman she half-suspects may be involved in the murder. Class differences simmer. Malloy's interest in Frannie could be casual curiosity about a more upscale person than himself, but it could equally be sinister. Ruffalo handles the ambiguity superbly, his behaviour by turns touchy, sensitive



**Women of the night: Naomi Watts and Laura Elena Harring in 'Mulholland Dr'**



← and highly observant. (Ruffalo is the go-to actor for 21st-century near-noir; he's also in *Collateral*, *Shutter Island* and *Zodiac*.)

Frannie's yen for a potentially dangerous man cuts to the heart of noir's often queasy appeal. The city's underbelly as a context for desire is explored more exorbitantly here even than in *Mulholland Dr.*, but the film is also curious about the lighter side of single women in New York. *In the Cut* adopts the point of view of people who too often find themselves alone in their apartment, bemoaning their inability to make contact with the world – the internet-dating generation's predicament. Some of the chatter between Frannie and Pauline about sex and clothes seems like a mild satire of *Sex and the City* – then at the height of its television fame. But it's the way that Campion, in scene after scene, juxtaposes powerful female desire with vulnerability that makes *In the Cut* a noir unlike any other.

#### 4. The Electronic Night: 'Collateral'

(Michael Mann, 2004)

Mann's assassin drama is really about social justice, but the way it changed the game for noir has more to do with its technical advances. *Collateral* was probably the first noir-ish film to fully employ the digital RED camera, which captures the electronic urban night in a way that's closer to how our eyes adapt to see it. The film is mostly set in a taxi, an environment that allows us to view nocturnal downtown LA in its gleaming, yellowed corporate glory – roaming coyotes and all. Max (Jamie Foxx), an African-American who has dreams of building his own limo company, is the driver. An easeful figure, he couldn't be less like the obvious noir prototype of Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*. The film starts calmly, with a nicely judged flirtation scene between Max and Annie (Jada Pinkett Smith), a lawyer who seems out of his league, but is charmed by his honesty and ambition. But then she gets out and we meet the next customer, Vincent (Tom Cruise), the white assassin whose schedule of witness murders drives the rest of the film.

Like Nolan and Lynch, Mann is a director who has revisited noir again and again. If his magisterial heist epic *Heat* (1995) seemed a hypercharged summary of all his favourite dramatic situations from the myriad TV cop shows he'd worked on, as well as his TV film *The Jericho Mile* (1979) and the features *Thief* (1981) and *Manhunter* (1986), *Collateral* takes certain of those elements and plays them more quietly, like mutterings in the corner of your mind. Vincent, a Nietzschean figure, rides Max's benign, good-guy worldview as hard as he does his cab (which gets wrecked in stages). The killer espouses a life lived in the moment, and recapitulates the essence of Orson Welles's "would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving" speech from *The Third Man* by asking whether Max's life was changed one bit by the slaughter in Rwanda (and, of course, he's saying that to a black man).

So Vincent is the characteristic Mann figure: the guy living at the extreme who has to hold on to his angst (he dresses like a yuppie, but



Night and the city: Tom Cruise in 'Collateral'

*The digital camera captures the electronic urban night in a way that's closer to how our eyes adapt to see it*

was, we learn, raised by the state); he even has the same name as Al Pacino's thief-taker in *Heat*. However dominant he is in the dialogue exchanges, Vincent is not the protagonist. Yet Max cannot achieve his apotheosis without taking on some of Vincent's attitude. One of the best scenes is where Max has to pretend to be the assassin in order to get information from the gangster who's sponsoring the killings. He's doing very badly at it, but then takes off his glasses and repeats one of Vincent's tough-guy riffs in an ice-cool manner. (This transference of personality is like a miniature of what happens in *A History of Violence*.) To be

a success in the *Collateral* world, you need to become a reluctant killer against the grain of your conscience – a classic noir conclusion.

#### 5. High School Confidential: 'Brick'

(Rian Johnson, 2005)

Thanks to *Brick* we don't have to imagine what it would be like to merge a John Hughes high-school movie with a classic noir. Of all the films included here, this one cleaves closest as a narrative to the early-1940s models. Even the youth of the actors is less of a divergence than it might appear: Joseph Gordon-Levitt was 24 when he played Brendan, a soft-looking student type who, in the opening scene, is contemplating the corpse of his ex-girlfriend Emily (Emilie de Ravin), which lies in a storm-drain outlet. This made the actor about five years younger than, say, Robert Mitchum and Alan Ladd were when they first put on a raincoat. His female co-stars de Ravin and Nora



Zehetner (who plays the femme fatale Laura) were also 24, and thus older by two years than Lauren Bacall was in *The Big Sleep*, yet four years younger than Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*.

Brendan is not as soft as he looks. Writer-director Rian Johnson's script – heavily influenced by Dashiell Hammett, who invented hardboiled detective fiction with his Continental Op stories – seems at first to give his hero the moralising knight-errant persona and sparkling wise-guy patter of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. "I've got all five senses and I slept last night. That gives me the edge over all of you," he tells a threatening gaggle of stoners. An early strategy sees him win a knockdown fight with a football jock, but soon he's getting beaten up all the time, the way a private detective should be.

A flashback from the opening death scene to "two days previously" sets us up to follow Brendan as he unravels the sordid tale of Emily, who wanted to be on the inside of the hooked-up narcotics set rather than "eat with" a loner like him. Eventually we find that Brendan is no knight after all – he ratted out his own dealing partner to the school because he'd lured Emily away.

If you go with it, the conceit of high-school kids speaking and behaving as if they were in *Red Harvest* works wonderfully. It also leads to some great gag scenes, such as when drug overlord 'The Pin' (Lukas Haas) tells the thoroughly beat-up Brendan, lying in his basement, that they should return to the real world; we next find them sitting in the kitchen being given milk and cookies by the overlord's doting mother. Another fine moment sees Brendan come on like the DA as he bullies the vice-principal, forcing him to make a mutual back-scratching deal.

*Noir* is easy to spoof, but it's hard to do it well. *Brick* is a brilliant spoof – though not one as blatant as Shane Black's elegantly airy *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005). But no one should be fooled by the high-school setting into thinking *Brick* is cutesy. It remains true to drug-scene violence and the heartbreak that makes Brendan both a tough guy against type and a highly intelligent provocateur of mayhem. One nice twist is that his intelligence-gathering techie partner is called Brain, and may not actually exist outside Brendan's head, which means he's been talking to himself even more than the average tough guy.

#### 6. The Valve Wide Open: 'Sin City'

(Robert Rodriguez & Frank Miller, 2005)

*Sin City* brought *noir* back to its pulp-magazine origins, using green-screen CGI technology to exactly recreate the exquisitely etched, near-monochrome ink-splash world of four of comic-book legend Frank Miller's *Sin City* stories, all set in the seething dystopian hellhole of the imaginary Basin City. The actors (Bruce Willis et al) are shot and lit by Rodriguez to merge seamlessly into animated panels from Miller's pages. For anyone who's ever been a comic-book fan, it's an exhilarating experience – one that's much truer to the Pop Art quality of, say, the Marvel or DC superhero comics



'Brick'

of the 1960s than any 'realistic' adaptation of those has yet achieved. There's apt usage of Miller's trademark white-out-of-black effects: white blood, the rectangles of sticking plaster on the rock-like head of doomed thug Marv (Mickey Rourke), the figure of Dwight (Clive Owen) falling as a flat white shape against black tar. Similarly enjoyable are the privileged small details – eyes, a bed, a dress – picked out in colour at key moments.

Transparently immersed in a graphic-novel vice world, *Sin City* is able to push its levels of violence – and show nearly all women as lissome, semi-clothed or naked S&M vamps – to a degree you'd never get away with in a realistic-looking movie. The film is a relentless hymn to bloodlust, with a sidebar concern for romantic promises. At the scene of the massacre of bad guys at the end of the fourth story 'The Big Fat Kill', wanted murderer Dwight – who has engineered the doom of gangsters trying to take over the prostitute-run Old Town – describes his machine-gun toting former lover thus: "The Valkyrie at my side is shouting and laughing with the pure hateful bloodthirsty joy of the slaughter... and so am I." Marv, the implacable super-tough hunk of 'The Hard Goodbye' section, extols the pleasures of torture. It's comical – in the gallows sense – to see how blatantly Rodriguez takes *noir*'s position as a site of repressed and

undirected desires and opens up the valve.

As with *A History of Violence*, there's a mock-epic quality to the way graphic-novel voiceover description and speech-bubble dialogue is written that also tends to grant further distance from the real world, allowing greater licence. *Sin City* is fantasy fiction of a kind that caters blatantly to the urges of young males, cashing in on the fact that we remain fond of our adolescent pleasures in later life.

#### 7. Gun Control: 'A History of Violence'

(David Cronenberg, 2005)

Although it mimics the 1947 classic *Out of the Past* in its premise of a mild-mannered, seemingly innocent small-town guy whose former life of crime catches up with him, *A History of Violence* only confirms its *noir* status in the last section, when Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen) returns to Philadelphia, his native territory, to finally erase his former self – crazy Joey Cusack. Up until then it's as much a family drama about a man who becomes a local hero when he foils an armed robbery at his diner by killing the two perpetrators, only to find that press photos attract the attentions of gangsters from back East.

There are folksy touches in Cronenberg's film that remind one of the soap-opera elements in *Twin Peaks*; and again, as in *Sin City*, the dialogue (no voiceover here) has its roots in a graphic novel (by John Wagner and Vince Locke), from which screenwriter Josh Olson's script was adapted. The film has some, but not too much, of the portentousness of Sam Mendes's 2002 gangster-*noir* graphic-novel adaptation *Road to Perdition* (a film that sits stylistically about halfway between this and *Sin City*). But Cronenberg's main interest, as ever, is in the psychology of Tom Stall's Janus personality, and in what the irruption of violence into an 'ordinary' life does to his lawyer wife Edie (Maria Bello), teenage son Jack (Ashton Holmes) and young daughter Sarah (Heidi Hayes). There's a fascinating role-play contrast between



Comic-book noir: Bruce Willis in 'Sin City'

➔ a pre-revelation sex scene in which Edie dresses up as a teenage cheerleader to liven up the Stalls' wedding anniversary, and a more primal post-revelation coupling on the stairs of their 'little house on the prairie'.

The moment when Edie realises who she's been married to for so long is typical of the dialogue and the dilemma: Tom: "What do you think you heard?" Edie: "It's not what I heard... It's what I saw. I saw Joey. I saw you turn into Joey right before my eyes. I saw a killer, the one Fogarty warned me about. You did kill men back in Philly, didn't you? Did you do it for money? Or did you do it because you enjoyed it?" Tom: "Joey did, both. I didn't. Tom Stall didn't."

The final scene, when Tom returns to this once normal home in Millbrook, Indiana, shows that the re-emergence of his violent self is regarded precisely as if he'd had an affair, and he's offered the same sort of forgiveness (much as Brody constantly is in *Homeland*). *A History of Violence* can be read as a film about gun control. Here is the Midwestern citizen, who's fine as long you treat him decent, but will defend his own to the death. So the Stall family's shotgun refers to the one in so many US homes – and to the history that put it there.

#### 8. Sunshine noir: 'Tell No One' ('Ne le dis à personne') (Guillaume Canet, 2006)

This French adaptation of US writer Harlan Coben's thriller is perhaps the most difficult of my selections to justify as a *noir*. For such a dark-themed thriller – it has paedophilia, corrupt cops, sadistic assassins, street gangs and corrupt politicians – *Tell No One* seems to go out of its way to be sunny and provincial. Though half of the film is shot in Paris, even the urban scenes are mostly spacious and leafy. The hospital where conscientious paediatrician Dr Alex Beck (François Cluzet) works is in Clignancourt, at

#### Although it mimics 1947 classic 'Out of the Past', 'A History of Violence' only confirms its noir status in the last section

the northern tip of Paris, but it seems a bubble of calm – except when the thug-like Bruno (Gilles Lellouche) turns up with his haemophiliac son and won't let anyone but Alex touch him. Alex has a big fluffy Briard dog, and his sister Anne is a showjumper. His family come from the Yvelines region, near the Rambouillet forest. They couldn't be more bourgeois and French.

The film begins in flashback, in that forest, eight years before the main action. The next evening, after an outdoor family dinner, Alex and his wife Margot (Marie-Josée Croze) take their annual swim in a lake just as the sun is starting to go down. After it's dark, Margot swims away from the raft where she and Alex have been having a small tiff. He admires her body as she gets out of the water and stands on the jetty. A moment later he hears her scream, swims for the shore and – as he's climbing the ladder – gets knocked out and falls back into the water. When he comes round, he finds that Margot has been murdered. Soon we jump forward to the inciting incident eight years on, when Beck gets an email with a video clip that shows Margot is still alive – just as the police discover two new male bodies at the lake.

Since Alex is set up as the suspect in several murders, isn't *Tell No One* just a classic wrong-man thriller? Not in my book. Apparently French director Guillaume Canet rang Coben and was very persuasive about how he would adapt the film. When the planned Hollywood version collapsed, Coben (who appears briefly in the film) was happy to offer it to Canet, he said, because unlike Hollywood execs, the

Frenchman understood it was a love story first and a thriller second. Personally, I find the romance element of Coben's novel cheesy, so for me the transfer to France makes Beck's undying passion for a seemingly dead woman more plausible. Since it's a redeemed love story, rather than the usual doomed affair, the sunniness of the *mise en scène* makes sense; but the desperation with which Alex clings to his romantic illusions while being capable of bluffing a *banlieue* thug suggests that he could find his own history of violence.

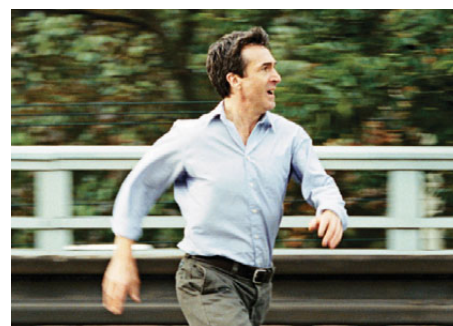
*Tell No One* is also included here to represent the renaissance of the Europe-set thriller. I have argued before that its soul was reborn with John Frankenheimer's *Ronin* (1998), which set the tonal template for Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity* (2002). Of course Frankenheimer and Liman are US directors, but they rekindled a taste for a muted-palette, existential Euro-thriller that encouraged the likes of Niels Arden Oplev's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2009 – so ably remade in the US by David Fincher) and Götz Spielmann's *Revanche* (2008). The remarkable career of Jacques Audiard is also a factor. His Hitchcock tribute *Read My Lips* (2001), *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (2005) – a brilliant remake of James Toback's *Fingers* (1977) – and his prison movie *A Prophet* (2009) all feed off *noir* atmospherics. *Tell No One*, however, is a different proposition: a *noir* disguised in sunshine.

#### 9. Old School: 'The Black Dahlia' (Brian De Palma, 2005)

If there's one pulp author of recent times who's remained true to the darker impulses behind *noir* it is, of course, James Ellroy. Of the 'LA Quartet' of novels published between 1987 and 1992 that made his reputation – *The Black Dahlia*, *The Big Nowhere*, *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz* – two have been made into feature



Domestic disturbance: Hatice Aslan in 'Three Monkeys'



'Tell No One'



'A History of Violence'



films: illustriously with Curtis Hanson's *L.A. Confidential* (1997), and very beautifully here, in a work of similar scale and ambition, yet with even more adoration of the 1940s trademark look. This is the only costume-drama *noir* period piece included here, and in terms of old-school Hollywood glamour, few can do better (with a half-reasonable budget) than De Palma. Though (for an extremely dark subject) it keeps a light tone most of the time, and avoids spoofery, De Palma's epic direction itself amounts to a grandiose, grit-free sort of pastiche – with gorgeous melancholic orchestral interludes.

The film at first describes a developing love triangle between two police partners, Dwight 'Bucky' Bleichert (Josh Hartnett) and Lee Blanchard (Aaron Eckhart) – former boxers who bonded after a staged-for-their-bosses rematch – and Blanchard's girlfriend Katherine 'Kay' Lake (Scarlett Johansson), whom he stole from a sadistic racketeer he had imprisoned. When Blanchard engineers their transfer to a special team investigating the brutal torture and death of young wannabe actress Elisabeth 'Betty' Short – soon known to the press as 'The Black Dahlia' – Bleichert starts to worry about him. "He's all bent out of shape on this dead girl," he tells Kay.

The sweet, brow-furrowing Hartnett is perfect for these observant early stages, but doesn't gain the gravitas to handle what comes later, as the story gets more baroque and perverse, building up to a truly hard-to-credit climax. If De Palma's lushness at times seems an odd equivalent to the clipped, staccato urgency of Ellroy's prose, it does sweeten the pill of the Black Dahlia's revolting fate. (Of course, there isn't yet a film of Ellroy's best book, the autobiographical *My Dark Places*, in which he pays for the real-life 1958 murder of his mother to be reinvestigated and reveals his own dangerous obsession with the real-life Dahlia case.)

De Palma's film also represents LA cop *noir*. In 2006, at a time when the novelistic realism of television's Baltimore-based *The Wire* (2002-8) was the cultural talking-point, it was refreshing to see such an operatic cop drama. Most cop dramas since have stayed closer to their televisual equivalents. Ellroy's novels reveal how deep and longstanding corruption has been in the LAPD, and other dramas have been quick to exploit this understanding. TV's *The Shield* (2002-8), which ran parallel to *The Wire*, was about LAPD cops operating without restraint (much like the Yorkshire police of David Peace's *Red Riding* novels), and was inspired by the late-1990s Rampart Division scandal.

Ellroy and writer-director Oren Moverman subsequently zoned in on the same material for *Rampart* (2011); David Ayer's recent *End of Watch* (2012) is more respectful of front-line cops (if not their colleagues). But films about the LAPD can't dodge the stink in the way that, say, James Gray's *We Own the Night* (2007) can romanticise the NYPD with its Cimino-like love of milieu and the crowd scene – or the way that David Fincher makes a workaday, diligent public servant out of San Francisco's Inspector Dave Toschi (Ruffalo again) in his superb serial-killer procedural movie *Zodiac* (2007).



High noir style: Scarlett Johansson in 'The Black Dahlia'

#### 10. Rolling Thunder: 'Three Monkeys' ('Uç Maymun') (Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2008)

Though a director of international festival art cinema of the highest quality, Ceylan has never been shy of borrowing moves from genre cinema. In particular he likes the shock reveal of ghost stories. You can see it when the lead character falls asleep and imagines being suffocated by sand on the beach in *Climates* (2006), and again here we have the double ghostly appearance of the central family's young son – who was drowned before the film begins – at moments when family honour is compromised.

*Three Monkeys*, though, is wholeheartedly a *noir*. It begins, like the early scene in *Mulholland Dr*, with a rear shot of a car driving at night – here through a thunderstorm. The driver is Servet (Ercan Kesal), a relatively wealthy businessman trying to move into politics, who's having trouble staying awake. He kills a pedestrian by accident and flees when a second car comes, knowing they got his licence-plate number. Being arrested will destroy his political ambitions, so he calls his driver Eyüp (Yavuz Bingöl), and persuades him to take the rap in exchange for his continued salary and a lump sum when he gets out of prison.

Eyüp's family are relatively poor and live literally on the wrong side of the railway tracks. His attractive wife Hacer (Hatice Aslan) dotes on his feckless teenage son Ismail (Ahmet Rifat Sungar). When he fails his exams for college, Ismail asks her to get Servet to lend him the money for a car, so he can work as a school driver. She gets the

money but Servet makes a pass at her and soon they're having an affair. Ismail discovers this, but doesn't confirm his father's sharp suspicions. When Eyüp gets out, the film moves broodingly, inexorably towards murder.

The cinematography is high-contrast, replete with rough skin textures, shadows and bruised purple skies. The plot follows a fatalistic downward spiral that's like a shadow version of *A History of Violence*, in that all the family collude not to acknowledge even to each other the transgressions they've committed. There's barely anything approaching an action scene. Everything is concentrated on Chekhovian interactions between people, all shrouded close by a very Turkish sense of *noir*.

*Three Monkeys* stands here as the most obvious example of the regular use of the *noir* palette by international auteurs. (Sarunas Bartas's 2010 *Eastern Drift* – a realist tale of the downfall of a petty thug – would have worked equally well.) But a list of recent *noir*-influenced arthouse films could also include Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité* (1999), Robert Guédiguian's *La ville est tranquille* (2000), Fabián Bielinsky's *Nine Queens* (2000), Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible*, Michael Haneke's *Hidden* (2004), Béla Tarr's *The Man from London* (2007), the Dardenne brothers' *The Silence of Lorna* (2008) and many others.

#### 11. Brit Punk Noir: 'Red Riding: The Year of Our Lord 1974' (Julian Jarrold, 2009)

Nothing like *Red Riding* had ever come out of British film or television before, although you can find fragments of

novelist David Peace's poetic approach to an underworked period of British crime history in all sorts of punkish cultural artefacts: music, song lyrics, posters. Peace's incandescent Blake-as-a-tabloid-writer style in his novels *1974*, *1977*, *1980* and *1983* is unique in its combination of words-as-bullets, indelible imagery and zealous fury at Yorkshire police corruption and violence. Tony Grisoni's vivid scripts for the trilogy (which missed out *1977*, to keep costs down for commissioners FilmFour) were written to be shot as films – which is how they were first experienced in the US – but were seen by most people in Britain on Channel 4. This cross-platform fluid identity – one that affects several *noir* works here – cannot diminish how cinematic these works are, or how much they raised the game for both kinds of crime drama in the UK.

I've chosen the opener of the trilogy to represent the whole because it is the most straightforwardly *noir*-ish in plot and tone. In *1974*, a pre-teen schoolgirl, Claire Kemplay, goes missing, and cocky young *Yorkshire Post* reporter Eddie Dunford (Andrew Garfield), back from an unsuccessful sojourn down south, thinks the police are ignoring links between several cases. When his colleague Barry Gannon (Anthony Flanagan) warns him that "there are death squads in every city", Eddie dismisses him as paranoid. After Kemplay's body has been found – she's been tortured and raped, and has swan's wings stitched into her back – Eddie is sidelined by his editor, and the police swoop on a Roma site that happens to have been earmarked for development by local developer John Dawson (Sean Bean). But Eddie can't keep his nose out, and when Gannon is found dead, he presses a connection between Dawson and Paula Garland (Rebecca Hall), one of the mothers grieving for a murdered daughter, to the point where the police work him over and warn him off. It all leads to a classic confrontation that's as Yorkshire as batter mix yet as cinematic as anything else in this article.

When *1974* was about to be transmitted, I praised its "crisp, energised bleakness", adding that "it looks like a dream collision of early Wim Wenders and prime Mike Hodges" and writing about Brit *noir*'s "air of fatal misery" – a tradition that loops back to Roeg and Cammell's *Performance* (1970), Hodges's *Get Carter* (1971) and Sidney Lumet's *The Offence* (1972). I stand by that appraisal. The later films in the trilogy play out in the shadow of the real-life Yorkshire Ripper case and go further into fascist levels of police activity and collusion with paedophiles – all of which has an even darker ring after so much has come out about the Yorkshire Police-related cases of Jimmy Savile and the Hillsborough disaster.

Crime films of all sorts have boomed in the UK in recent years, a run that probably started with the comedy geezer gangsterism of Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998). Several films stand out from that ruck, including Jonathan Glazer's *Sexy Beast* (2000), Shane Meadows's *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004), Paul Andrew Williams's *London to Brighton* (2006) and Ben Wheatley's *Down*

## The opening sequence of 'Drive' is pure, exquisite noir tribute, with an LA night as evocative as that in 'Collateral'

*Terrace* (2009) and *Kill List* (2011) – you can add your own examples. But what makes *Red Riding* so tantalising is that its aesthetic ambition made it possible to imagine a British television series to rival *The Wire* or Denmark's phenomenal *noir* whodunnit *The Killing*. Possible, that is, if you could find the money and TV-company confidence to back such outlandish talents as were brought together for the trilogy. Sadly, that ain't gonna happen.

### 12. Ultra-violence: 'Drive'

(Nicolas Winding Refn, 2011)  
Refn's Copenhagen-set *Pusher* trilogy, made between 1996 and 2005, established the director as a purveyor of gritty, highly realistic and violent drug-gang films that tapped into a night mood of constant fear and tension – all carried off with very grim humour. Two English-language films made quickly in Britain, the prison psychobiography *Bronson* (2008) and the Viking saga *Valhalla Rising* (2009), got him the attention of actor Ryan Gosling, who seems to have been crucial to Refn getting the chance to make this adaptation of James Sallis's lean slice of neo-*noir* fiction.

I've avoided the term neo-*noir* for most of this article, but use it here to distinguish what it conjures in my own head. Rather than simply denoting anything vaguely *noir*-ish, neo-*noirs* are films in love with gleaming surfaces, mirrored skyscrapers and the like: William Friedkin's *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985), Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel* (1989) and Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995) are buffed and waxed in this way. But *Drive* is also – for the first half of its 100 minutes at least – a tribute to the mythic *noir* street epics Walter Hill made in that run from *The Driver* (1978), through *The Warriors* (1979) and *48hrs* (1982) to *Streets of Fire* (1984).

Ryan Gosling plays the 'Driver' – exactly what Ryan O'Neal's character is called in Hill's movie of the same name (which itself was inspired by Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samourai*): a young man of few words and a dazzling stare who works as a movie stuntman and sometime getaway driver. The film begins with this nicely definitive line of patter: "You give me the time and the place, I give you a five-minute window. Anything happens in that five minutes and I'm yours. No matter what. Anything happens a minute either side of that and you're on your own." Its opening sequence is pure, exquisite *noir* tribute, with an LA night at least as evocative and exciting as that in *Collateral*, and the driver's ordinary-looking but souped-up Chevvy playing brilliant cat-and-mouse with police choppers and patrol cars.

Sadly, Refn then lets the film settle into a gawky kind of love triangle that unfeasibly casts the classily elfin Carey Mulligan as the wife of a felon doing time. All the excitement of a film ostensibly about fast cars is allowed to drain away.

For Refn either isn't interested in what cars can do, or he didn't have the budget to find out. He prefers a character to stand perfectly still, framed staring in awe at whatever's just happened, as if in a trance. And one thing's for sure in any Refn film: sooner or later there's extreme violence. Sure enough, the cool, good-looking, neatly dressed Driver shows how nasty he can be. In an intimate scene in a lift, a soft smooch with Mulligan is followed by the stamping and crunching of an assassin's face to pulp – a scene as hard to watch as the brutality meted out by Casey Affleck's Lou Ford in *The Killer Inside Me* (2010) to Jessica Alba's Joyce Lakeland. The opprobrium that film attracted onto Michael Winterbottom's head seems to have missed Refn altogether, perhaps because nobody expects anything different from him. Thus *Drive* for me looks like the real thing, but has no power under the bonnet. I include it here because, for ten glorious opening minutes, it captures the mythic quality of Hill's best films. And I'm glad that's still alive. ☺



Through a pint glass, darkly: Andrew Garfield and Rebecca Hall in 'The Year of Our Lord 1974'





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ARTISTS' FILM & VIDEO

## NOSTALGIA FOR A TV UTOPIA



The paradox of the staged conversation: 'Homme à femmes (Michel Debrane)'

The sexual, the conceptual and the quaintly comic collide in the work of Gerard Byrne, as his first UK retrospective reveals

**By Brian Dillon**

On at least 12 occasions between 1928 and 1930, several of the Paris Surrealists met, under the direction of André Breton, to discuss matters of sex and sexuality. The meetings were conceived as research of a sort, and the conversations transcribed. The first two sessions took place at 54 rue du Château – then the home of Yves Tanguy, Marcel Duhamel and Jacques Prévert – and were printed in the 11th issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*. The published debates covered such topics as masturbation, homosexuality, threesomes, the frequency of simultaneous orgasm, the urge to have sex in a church ("It doesn't appeal to me because of the bells," Prévert complained) and whether a woman could tell, without recourse to 'local examination', if a man had had an orgasm. It did not occur to Breton to consult an actual woman on this last point – in fact no women took part in the discussions until late in 1930.

The texts that resulted from these sessions – they were published in English as *Investigating*

*Sex* in 1994 – are instructive and absurd: records of the artists' and writers' modernity, radicalism, misogyny and frequently hilarious naivety. Breton, predictably, is the least liberal, and especially fretful when it comes to any hint of homosexuality: "Onanism, to the extent that it is acceptable, must be accompanied by images of women... I accuse homosexuals of confronting human tolerance with a mental and moral deficiency." Prévert is more sanguine, and wonders if men who merely jerk each other off may even be classed as homosexuals. Tanguy and Raymond Queneau engage in a lot of verbal swagger about their openness to most eventualities, including sex with women who limp or are not especially clean.

At over 80 years' remove, it would be easy, says the Irish artist Gerard Byrne, to "hang this text out to dry": to let both its retrospectively suspect sexual politics and pseudo-anthropological ambition condemn the participants out of their own mouths. But that has not at all been Byrne's intention in his recent video work *A Man and a Woman Make Love* (2012) – included in the first major UK survey exhibition of the artist's work, at the Whitechapel Gallery in London – which reconstructs the first of the Surrealists' discussions from January 1928, taking the published version as script for a 20-minute,

single-take performance modelled on both contemporary soap opera and the half-century history of live television drama. While not exactly shying away from the question of gender – "It's the only way to read the text, on some level," the artist tells me – Byrne is also "interested in the paradox of a closed conversation, staged with the intention of its being published". The result is a piece that shuttles, like much of his work, between a quite austere conceptual interest in the

*Byrne's latest video reconstructs a Surrealist discussion about sex in the form of a single-take soap-opera-style performance*



'1984 and Beyond'

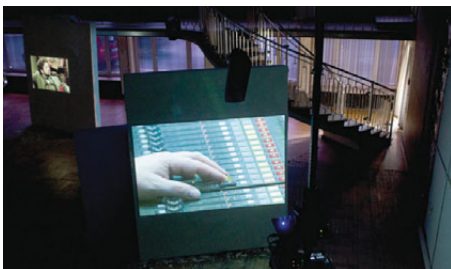


transition from text to image, clear-eyed Brechtian appraisal of the lures of a certain kind of performance, and some outright comedy at the level of the 'script' itself.

Previous works of Byrne's have essayed similar transformations with lesser-known (if more mainstream) transcriptions of historically weighted encounters. The Whitechapel show includes the earliest of these, *Why It's Time for Imperial, Again* (2002). The text of a 1981 Chrysler print advertisement, featuring an implausibly casual dialogue between Frank Sinatra and the motor company's CEO Lee Iacocca, is performed in the streets of Long Island City by actors who barely resemble the two men. Somewhat closer to the conceptual and comic concerns of Byrne's latest film is 2003's *New Sexual Life Styles*, for which he restaged, in a late-Modernist pavilion near Dublin, a discussion of sexual mores originally published in the pages of *Playboy* in 1973. It was followed in 2004 by *Homme à femmes* (Michel Debrane), based on a 1977 interview between Jean-Paul Sartre and journalist Catherine Chaine; and in 2007 by *1984 and Beyond*. Another *Playboy* roundtable, this time from 1963, provided the script, in which prominent science-fiction writers of the day (including Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein) imagined life, love and politics in the future. There's a comic awkwardness to the predictions canvassed – they orbit a decidedly *Playboy*-sanctioned lifestyle – but the historical strangeness of the piece is more vexed than that; the very fact of their imagining the future at all seems oddly out of time.

More recently, Byrne has tethered his interest in textually derived re-enactments to the history of art itself. Also at Whitechapel is *A Thing Is a Hole in a Thing It Is Not* (2010), a series of four linked videos about the Minimalist art of the late 1960s in which Byrne restages a performance by Robert Morris, forensically examines the museum-bound afterlife of the Minimalists' works, and turns a radio discussion between Frank Stella, Donald Judd and Dan Flavin into a minutely observed short film set in a contemporary radio studio. What all of these pieces have in common is a certain wry literalism: his work's complexities of image, timing and concept all arise out of perfectly laconic acts of discovery and presentation.

*A Man and a Woman Make Love* was originally made for Documenta 13 and shown in the summer of 2012 in the ballroom of the Grand City Hotel in Kassel, its single take and swooping camera movements dispersed on several screens, which is how it will be



'A Man and a Woman Make Love'

shown again at Whitechapel. As a work in part about the nature of evidence and reportage – "one of the things that fascinates me about journalism is the idea of access" – it's given an extra layer of historical richness by having been produced in collaboration with the Irish state broadcaster RTE. Byrne is 43 and was born in Dublin, so grew up (like myself) with access, then uncommon outside Irish cities, to both native and British television. One compared outputs constantly, and not only in terms of obvious disparities between RTE's and the BBC's reporting of the Troubles. Irish TV aped UK formats but balked at its relative permissiveness, except on Friday nights, when *The Late Late Show* risked chat-show discussion of sex and sexual morality with foreign guests. (There was recently a hint of the historical centrality of this programme to Irish culture in Luke Fowler's Turner-prize-nominated film *All Divided Selves*: R. D. Laing blind drunk on prime-time RTE in 1985.)

"I probably went to RTE with *The Late Late Show* in mind," recalls Byrne. "I wanted to make something that really was like a TV programme." Discussions with executive producer David McKenna suggested another route, however: the work skirts the history of televisual controversy for a more oblique approach through the tradition of live drama. Byrne worked with Alan Robinson, an English director on RTE's long-running Dublin-set soap opera *Fair City*, and he found filming of that show fascinating: "It's all about camera movement. The actors are really just meant to be consistent. In terms of filming, it's mostly an acquisition process: getting it in the can." Byrne has a long-standing interest in the history of live TV drama – especially American classics such as the pre-Fonda *Twelve Angry Men* (1954) or the Rod Serling-scripted *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (1956) – and with its one take, multiple cameras and cutaways to a studio audience, *A Man and a Woman Make Love* has something of the real-time awkwardness of that form, as well as some knowing "element of nostalgia for the idea of broadcasting, for ideas of synchronicity and simultaneity that seem to have disappeared".

As Byrne's overlapping London exhibitions attest, his art has long been exercised by the artistic potential inherent in found texts and by the estranging things that everyday photography, film and (perhaps especially) television have done to our reading of such texts in any case. At Lisson Gallery in London he's showing *Subject* (2009): a series of black-and-white video enactments of writings discovered among the archives at Leeds University, an institution that in the 1970s built a sophisticated 'television centre' that was meant to be the informational heart of the campus. The idea of television as utopia died – much as it did in the mainstream – but it left behind ways of seeing that Byrne exploits in his latest work with austere and engaging skill. 📺

**i** **'Gerard Byrne: A State of Neutral Pleasure'** is at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, from 17 January to 8 March 2013. **'Present Continuous Past'** is at Lisson Gallery, London, from 30 January to 2 March

● **Rosa Barba's** exhibition 'Subject to Constant Change' explores the full range of her film works (including 'Subconscious Society', below), which enquire into the physical characteristics of the medium, including celluloid, light and sound, and the structure of cinematic narrative. In keeping with the material's shifting points of view and fragmented voices, this multi-platform film installation will be exhibited in distinct ways, responding to the galleries' architectures. Manchester Cornerhouse from 26 January to 17 March; Turner Contemporary, Margate, from 1 February to 6 May.

[www.cornerhouse.org](http://www.cornerhouse.org)

[www.turnercontemporary.org](http://www.turnercontemporary.org)

● **Ed Atkins and Naheed Raza**, recipients of the Jerwood/Film and Video Umbrella Awards, will premiere their new commissions at Jerwood Space in London from 16 January until 24 February, presented as the second part of the exhibition 'Tomorrow Never Knows'. Raza's commission is a large-scale projection work that continues her exploration of the phenomenon of cryonics, delving deeper into our complex and often ambiguous relationship with death. Atkins sets his piece at the bottom of the ocean, as if to imply the latent presence of the unconscious, and uses motion-capture techniques to evoke the spark of vitality and individuality in inadvertent gestures. [www.jerwoodvisualarts.org](http://www.jerwoodvisualarts.org)



● **Sanja Ivekovic's** exhibition 'Unknown Heroine' shows at the South London Gallery from 14 December to 24 February. It's the first UK retrospective of the Croatian artist, showcasing her pioneering work in film, installation, collage and performance. Tackling issues of female identity, consumerism and historical amnesia, the exhibition features work made across four decades against a background of political unrest.

[www.southlondongallery.org](http://www.southlondongallery.org)

● **Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz** show three films at Tate Modern on 1 February – a staging of punk archives from a period between 1970 and 2031; a radical reimagining of the housewife set in Berlin Zoo; and a layering of labour, class, desire and drag in 'Normal Work' – that reflect on the interplay of sexuality, sexual perversions and representation, continuously returning to unrepresented or illegible moments in history. [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)



# IN THE MOOG

The soundtrack to *Performance* is a guide to the late-1960s countercultural soundscape – and a notable feat in its own right

By Frances Morgan

"The other performance, the one that really makes it, was the soundtrack," writes Paul Buck in his new book *Performance: The Biography of a 60s Masterpiece*, an exhaustive study of Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg's seminal 1968 feature starring James Fox as fugitive gangland enforcer Chas and Mick Jagger as reclusive former rock star Turner. As well as logging the film's various musical cues throughout his book, Buck devotes a short chapter to the story of how Jack Nitzsche came to compose its original music after a plan for the Rolling Stones to create it fell through.

As with most aspects of *Performance*, countercultural reference-points spin out from its soundtrack, which features figures such as Nitzsche, Randy Newman, Ry Cooder, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Merry Clayton and The Last Poets; it seems like an at-a-glance guide to the fashionable music of the period, with its sinewy blues rock, psychedelic soul, Black Power polemic, Eastern drones and analogue synthesiser textures. But this soundtrack is stranger than the sum of its parts, not just a bunch of hip signifiers that enhance the film's dual atmospheres of banal savagery and claustrophobic, erotic psychedelia. You feel intuitively from the searing opening sequence that this is a new kind of soundtrack, more akin to the way that, decades later, David Lynch would use music and sound in *Inland Empire*. Randy Newman's 'Gone Dead Train', an obvious 'opening' song, is faded down rapidly. Then there's the ominous white-noise pulse of the title theme, over which Merry Clayton's wordless vocal emerges. The audience is trusted to follow these leaps, accept the idea of music not only as a binding agent but also something disruptive and unsettling. Elsewhere, what is essentially a pop video (Jagger's rendition of 'Memo from Turner') appears within the film, and a diegetic sound source – a Muzak tape listened to by the gang – is both explicitly attended to ("I like that, turn it up") and then spread into the fabric of the film, phasing and warping as the picture discolours. Frank Mazzola's editing is highly rhythmic, whether capturing the taut energy of Chas's methodical violence or the dreamy, time-suspended ambience of Jagger, Anita Pallenberg and Michele Breton's first sex scene, set to Iranian santur music played by Nasser Rastigar-nejad.

It might seem heresy, then, to separate *Performance*'s music from its visuals, but the soundtrack album, reissued on CD in the mid-1990s, works on its own odd terms. It's here that the precision, insularity and sheer skill of Nitzsche's compositions stand out, revealing a stark, strangely cold quality at odds with the picture's relative opulence. The packaging, though, is far from authoritative: not even a credit, for instance, for electronic-music pioneer



Going electric: Turner (Mick Jagger) turns on

Bernie Krause, whose synth work is essential to the album's odd timbres. In the documentary *Influence and Controversy: The Making of Performance*, Jack Nitzsche's son talks about his father's fascination with the then-new Moog systems, of which only a handful had been built. As one half of Beaver & Krause, Krause had brought electronic sound to a number of pop records and films, including *Rosemary's Baby*, before collaborating with Nitzsche on *Performance*. His absence seems typical of the way electronic composing, in its early days, was seen as purely functional – sound effects rather than music – and less worthy of mention. Yet there is what seems like some very pointed use of a synth in *Performance* itself. At the height of Chas's mushroom trip, Jagger appears to patch a Moog system similar to the one Krause and Nitzsche would have played on the soundtrack, while we hear 'Poor White Hound Dog'. This brief piece of guitar-led funk has a churning, almost clumsy electronic undertow and is punctuated by little bursts of noise that sound like raw circuitry bleeding into the mix. As on the title track, Merry Clayton's liquid vocal rises above, fights free from this steely structure as if in direct opposition to it. You wonder if

Turner's isolation is echoed in the technology he surrounds himself with, the speakers, mics and amps arranged like barricades, with this ostentatiously modern instrument at the centre.

Paul Buck refers to the film's electronic music only in passing, skirting the ways it works with and against the soundtrack's blues and soul. He does, though, write perceptively about the palpable tension added by those forms. Both Turner and Jagger are white musicians



The sleeve of the soundtrack album



*It's an intensively composed, cocaine-fuelled Laurel Canyon creation that shines a dark light on London beyond Powis Square*

who got rich appropriating black music; Buck reminds us that “the overwhelming music presence in the film will be black and ethnic, though it will mainly be conceived, played and produced by white musicians.” When Chas wanders into Turner’s room to find The Last Poets’ ‘Wake Up, Niggers’ (selected, apparently, by Anita Pallenberg) blasting from some large speakers, we are meant to find it as disturbing as he clearly does; it strikes a similarly jarring note on the album, as if something has come suddenly into focus that can’t be ignored. While Buck notes approvingly the presence of Merry Clayton’s voice, by the soundtrack’s closing number she has become little more than a sound source, layered into an unearthly chorale. But Buck pays relatively little attention to what he calls the film’s ‘ethnic’ music. He doesn’t mention santur player Rastigar-nejad, a well-known figure in Persian classical music, based in the US by the 1960s; nor, despite its presence in the film, does Rastegar-nejad’s playing appear on the soundtrack album. Persia is a strong imagined presence throughout *Performance*, yet its incredibly rich music appears devoid of context.

Buck frequently describes *Performance* as a “mosaic” and its soundtrack could be considered similarly: you can listen to it for years and still find it full of gaps, secrets, tantalising sounds that don’t quite add up. “It’s all an illusion and an illusion on top of other illusions,” Jagger supposedly said of the piecemeal assemblage of ‘Memo from Turner’. It’s a perfect description of the soundtrack as a whole: an intensively composed, cocaine-fuelled Laurel Canyon creation that nonetheless shines a dark light on a London that seems to exist outside Turner’s Powis Square mansion in a state of simmering, decadent flux. It also feels like a missive from a pivotal point at which pop music was achieving a kind of gravitas as an internal, individualised soundtrack rather than a communal music. *Performance*’s soundtrack warrants a biography of its own – or at the very least a decent set of sleeve notes. ☺



Jack Nitzsche

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

Human performances from cinema’s early years seem notoriously stilted to our eyes. But dogs are naturals



By Matthew Sweet

So there we were in NFT1 – me and Her Majesty the Queen, watching Ewan McGregor emerge from a toilet, slick with human effluvia. There were some other people there, too, I think – a gang of fellow film hacks, the BFI’s top brass, a scattering of producers – but I don’t quite remember what they were doing. It’s not often you get the chance to observe the reigning monarch reacting to a clip reel of great moments in British cinema.

At first, she was as impassive as she is on the coins. The 3rd Foot & Mouth hoisted their kilts without raising a titter. Helen Mirren frowned out from the screen. The real thing frowned back. But then, bounding into the frame, came a great performer of the silent era, bright-eyed and athletic in his driving goggles: Rover, hero of ‘The Dog Outwits the Kidnapper’ (1908).

Off he went, tail wagging, to confound a toddler-snatcher who decides, unwisely, to stop for a game of billiards and leave his victim in a car outside the pub. Instead of biting the offender’s leg or raising the alarm, Rover leapt calmly into the driver’s seat and motored to safety through the sunlit, unsurfaced roads of Walton-on-Thames. The star was a collie rather than a corgi, and his real name was Blair, but Her Majesty was undisappointed by the former and blissfully ignorant of the latter and, on that morning last November, looked much more amused than she ever does at the Royal Variety Performance.

The birth of the named film star is customarily measured from that moment in 1910 when Carl Laemmle decided that the best way to publicise Florence Lawrence was to spread the rumour that she had been mangled to death in a streetcar accident. But just as Laika reached the earth’s orbit several years before Gagarin, the four-legged leading player of the Hepworth Studios was receiving fan mail long before anyone knew the name of the Vitagraph Girl.

He made his debut in ‘Rescued by Rover’ (1905), engaging in a breathless house-to-house search for a baby stolen from its bassinette. (The director, Lewin Fitzhamon – Kurosawa to Blair’s Mifune – added urgency to his star’s performance by hiding sausages behind the kidnapper’s front door.) 395 prints of the picture were despatched abroad, principally to America – about the same number as were struck for US distributors of ‘The King’s Speech’. Sequels were, therefore, inevitable and numerous. Among the best is ‘Dumb Sagacity’ (1907), in which Blair enlists equine help to rescue a girl trapped by the tide. (The horse belonged to Fitzhamon, and was named Tariff, after the director’s commitment to British economic protectionism.)

Blair, though, was no lone wolf. Before the 1920s (and before Rin Tin Tin, Cheeta or Uggie), cinema possessed an animal as well as a human star system. In 1912, Charles Urban’s

company recruited Spot the Urbanora Dog, a tenacious Jack Russell with a human sidekick from Scotland Yard. In 1915, the Clarendon Studios in Croydon produced a flurry of sex comedies starring a feathered antecedent of Robin Askwith: Jack Spratt’s Parrot, a bird given to disrupting the business of human desire by smashing crockery during a seduction-scene or blackening the housemaid’s pillow with soot to imply she has been sleeping with a sweep. Percy Smith’s animal films – most famously ‘The Strength and Agility of Insects’ (1911) – are of a different order: a baroque form of snuff porn in which invertebrates, glued to tiny chairs, juggle miniature dumbbells with their feet. ‘The Centipede Human’, or near enough.

The act of gazing upon non-animal actors from this period has its occult qualities: early silent film stars are ghosts caught in a coincidence of light and chemicals on some forgotten afternoon before the Great War. Animal performers don’t seem so marooned in time. Unlike their biped collaborators, Edwardian dogs and flies and horses are indistinguishable from 21st-century dogs and flies and horses. They are conscious of the eye of the trainer, not the eye of the camera. Sausages are more important to them than feigning anxiety about a missing baby. When Blair looks into the lens he does it with regal indifference, not the hot, needy intensity of the human star.

At the end of her jubilee jaunt to BFI Southbank, the Queen was presented with a poster for Cavalcanti’s ‘The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby’ – an allusion to her visit to the set of the picture in June 1946. Did she remember the event? Did she recall that Hedda Hopper was also prowling around Ealing that day, and that Chips Rafferty teased the teenage princess by asking if she’d copied the style of the columnist’s hat? (“The Princess laughed”, reported the ‘Sydney Morning Herald’, “and asked him what he thought of the English countryside.”) If any of this did spring to mind, she resisted the desire to talk about it. She stood and stared around the room, silent as Rover, listening to the applause. Her Majesty must surely possess sagacity, but – how can I put this? – it’s not the talkative kind. ☺



A star is born: ‘Rescued by Rover’ (1905)



# WATCH, THINK, WITNESS

In his years at *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Libération*, the criticism of Serge Daney was distinguished by his acute attention to the image

By Gonzalo de Lucas

There's a gag in *The Pawnshop* (1916) where Charlie Chaplin listens to a broken watch with a stethoscope then executes a series of botched operations until all the pieces have been taken apart and the watch is destroyed. The poor guy who has taken the watch to the pawnshop observes him with astonishment, but without saying anything. What prevents him from reacting? His respect for Charlot's professional gestures, upon which the customer bestows credibility, even if they are contradicted by what he is actually seeing. But although the customer does not react, paralysed as he is by the authoritative manner of the moneylender, the filmmaker enables the spectator to do so. This is a truly cinematographic idea: Chaplin shows us the legitimised gestures of a supposed specialist only to ridicule them, so that the spectator may observe them at a distance and without fear.

Bad films put the viewer in the poor guy's shoes: they make us passively admire the craft and solemnity of what we see on screen – or on the other side of the counter. The bad critic does the same: he or she writes that the moneylender is a magnificent technician, and that his movements are quick and dexterous. Such cinema and criticism are mediocre because they block the relationship between watching and thinking; and cinema consists of watching and thinking at the same time.

Serge Daney's writing is situated at the meeting point between watching and thinking, or the place where thought brings us closer to an image. And what is it that traverses that movement but emotion? In a beautiful review of *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders, 1984), Daney

evokes a scene from *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1950) where Humphrey Bogart and Gloria Grahame are standing in the kitchen and he says: "A good love scene should be about something else besides love. For instance, this one. Me fixing grapefruit. You sitting over there, dopey, half-asleep. Anyone looking at us could tell we're in love." Daney writes: "And soon the viewer tells herself that maybe they are, but she wasn't actually thinking about that. Emotion aroused by the precariousness of the instant and the fragile beauty of cinema is able to make us feel that a scene is 'close' to us without needing to bring the camera 'closer'. Without the intrusion of the close-up, or the indiscretion of a zoom. That which we can call 'emotion' is a reverse camera movement which takes place in the body of the viewer." Here we have another truly cinematographic idea (and if Daney did anything in his writing, it was to put ideas in circulation): only this time it hasn't been created by the camera but by the encounter between the word and the image.

If Daney's criticism is so moving it's because, like Chaplin's or Ray's camera, his writing is situated in front of cinematographic images and all of a sudden brings them closer to us – as if he had made them palpable on our skin – without resorting to dramatic effects or rearranging the distance between viewer and screen. Spanning three main phases – his years at *Cahiers du cinéma* (1962–81), at *Libération* (1981–91) and his last and brief period at *Trafic* in 1992 – Daney's work stands in direct opposition to the gestures of ornamental professionalism, to the jargon and deceptive distinction that, as Chaplin's moneylender shows, serve only to

*For Daney, a moralist at heart, the memory of cinema is a melancholic melody but also a celebration*



Serge Daney (1944–92)

conceal the true form of things. Consider what Daney wrote about the influence that Jacques Rivette's article 'On Abjection' (1961) had on his life – that is, Rivette's categorical condemnation of a tracking shot in Gilles Pontecorvo's *Kapo* (1960) where the camera moves forward to reframe a woman's dead body after she has thrown herself on an electric barbed-wire fence: "Imagining Pontecorvo's gestures miming the tracking shot with his hands, I am even more upset with him because in 1961 a tracking shot still meant rails, personnel and physical effort." (Senses of Cinema, Issue 30, 2004. Translation by Laurent Kretzschmar. [http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/kapo\\_daney/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/kapo_daney/))

Daney juxtaposes this scene with another one in Mizoguchi Kenji's *Ugetsu monogatari* (1953): "In the Japanese countryside travellers are attacked by greedy bandits and one of them kills Miyagi with a spear. But he does it almost inadvertently, stumbling around, jolted by a violent impulse or a stupid reflex. This event seems so accidental that the camera almost misses it... By dissociating the movement of the camera from the movements of the actors, Mizoguchi did the exact opposite to *Kapo*. Instead of a petrifying glance, this was a gaze that 'seemed not to see.'" We can view this comparison between the tracking shot in *Kapo* and the camera movement in Mizoguchi's film – an association akin to Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* – as emblematic of Daney's cinematographic style; the appreciation of cinema as thought in a tangible form.

In 1959, the teenage Daney discovered film criticism when he bought an issue of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Just as the *nouvelle vague* can be seen as a response to Hollywood, Daney's thought would be marked by filiation from, and dialogue with, the aesthetics defended by *Cahiers*, whose legacy he undoubtedly inherited, as shown by his vivid evocation of Rivette's article. However, throughout his long tenure at *Cahiers*, Daney would also experience the aridity of the politicised language after 1968. Hence, once he left the magazine in 1981 to join the newspaper *Libération*, his writing became more luminous and sensitive. For Daney, a moralist at heart, the memory of cinema is a melancholic melody, but also a celebration: "Cinema only exists to bring back what was already seen once."

During his years at *Libération*, Daney insisted on opposing the image to the merely visual, the latter characterised by the cliché



Don't trust the expert: Charlie Chaplin in 'The Pawnshop'





Fixing grapefruit: 'In a Lonely Place'

whose meaning is inert, already given. "In bad films, nothing moves... In the great films, each element within the frame is moving, but at different speeds. The sky, more so than a blank screen, is the metaphor of those films, because of the moving clouds." Compared to the visual or the cliché, an image is an encounter with the other: "For me, the sine qua non of the image is alterity." (And here, the words of Godard come to mind: "There is the predisposition for an encounter: that is cinema. Cinema is love, encounter, love of ourselves, and of life, the love of ourselves and the earth... There can't be a film without love, love in some form. There can be novels without love, other works of art without love, but there can never be cinema without love.")

For Daney, the function of criticism is to assume the condition of a witness – of someone who has seen something and can speak about it. And yet, Daney compares that moment in Mizoguchi's film with an image that he had not actually seen ("Am I the only one who has never seen this movie and yet hasn't forgotten it? For I haven't seen *Kapo* and at the same time I have seen it. I have seen it because someone has shown it to me – with words."). Daney reminds us that montage is not just the relationship between two images that appear in front of our eyes but rather the relationship between a present, visible image and an absent, mental one (somehow filmed by the viewer). He shows us that the role of cinema is to make the viewer think cinematographically and the function of criticism should be to recognise the way in which this thought appears *between* images. Daney's critical writings are characterised by upholding the conviction that images orient us, point us to the truth, leave a proof, a sign; and that this truth also emerges from a relationship, from the association between images, between what we see on the screen and what we imagine, between the panning of Mizoguchi and the tracking shot that Daney never saw. And what is it that further brings them together but emotion, that reverse camera movement that is produced in the body of the viewer? As Danièle Huillet said praising John Ford: "We must not let images block imagination." ❧

**i** Translated by Mar Diestro-Dópido. The third volume of Serge Daney's collected writings, 'La Maison cinéma et le monde 3: Les Années Libé 1986–1991', was published in France last year

## FESTIVAL

# NEW NEW WAVES

This year's Seville festival, now under director José Luis Cienfuegos, offered bold signposts to the future of cinema

By Carlos Losilla

The most interesting films on offer at the ninth edition of the Seville Festival of European Cinema clearly marked out the pathways of contemporary cinema. On the one hand, the notion that what is referred to as a *good film* has to be perfect, with an impeccable structure and a coherent narrative, needs to be abandoned. On the other, this is manifested in a digressive style that generates dislocated pieces that can start in one place and end up somewhere very different via long detours and changes of direction.

In *Museum Hours*, the second 'fictional' film by Jem Cohen, documentary meddles in the narrative to reveal its artifice, yielding a peculiar love story, a portrait of Vienna and a study of Brueghel, among many other things. In *What Is Love* by Ruth Mader, the narrative starts out following one character then swaps to another, very different scenario with nothing unifying the whole, as if it were a museum installation with different screens.

*These films were elusive, evasive, mysterious and secretive, a new type of fiction where everything is possible*

In *The Last Time I Saw Macao* (*A última vez que vi Macau*) by João Pedro Rodrigues and João Rui Guerra da Mata, a voiceover narrates a story reminiscent of a *film noir* while the images show places and anonymous beings that only occasionally have anything to do with what we are hearing. All of the aforementioned are made by highly regarded filmmakers who have nothing to prove, but continue to engage in a constant search.

These three films were included in the 'New Waves' section, which looked to be a declaration of intent on the part of José Luis Cienfuegos, the brand-new director of this year's edition, who transformed the festival of Gijón into one of the most important in Europe during his 16-year tenure. Since taking over at Seville, Cienfuegos and his collaborators have demonstrated an uncommon intelligence, recognising a need not to dismantle the structures put in place by the previous team but merely to tweak them in order to introduce modest but fundamental changes. A slightly more radical spirit and an instinct for detecting new trends were the basic requirements; the main competition was not up for savage overhaul, so they struck an elegant balance between summarising what has been the most *indie* at other festivals and a peculiar shrewdness when filling up the slots with less conservative material.

Looked at that way, it wasn't a bad idea to



Intervention in reality: 'The Shine of Day'

put up against each other in competition the latest film by Manoel de Oliveira (*Gebo and the Shadow/O Gebo e a Sombra*) and the debut features of Greek filmmaker Ektoros Lygizos (*Boy Eating the Bird's Food*, Silver Award for best film and best actor) and Swedish filmmaker Gabriela Pichler (*Eat Sleep Die*, Gold Award for best film and best actress). These three films speak to the crisis of Europe's decline as a political and economic project, their characters oppressed by a hostile environment, but in very different styles: respectively, a melancholic plea for modern cinema, a conceptual, abstract aesthetic approach and a realism laced with humour. Oliveira was the safe bet, the others projects willing to risk all, something Matteo Garrone's *Reality* (Special Jury Prize), a failed Fellini-esque satire about Berlusconi's Italy, doesn't manage to do until near its end. Among other daring competition entries were *The Shine of Day* (*Der Glanz des Tages*) by Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel, an example of a kind of cinema that intervenes in reality through improvisation and constant switches of tone, and *Recoletos* (*arriba y abajo*), by the always surprising Pablo Llorca, about the immobility of contemporary Spanish society. *Paradise: Faith* (best script award), the second instalment of Ulrich Seidl's trilogy about the impossibility of happiness, also showed the depressive state of the continent through images as aggressive and heartrending as they were precise and rigorous.

The 'Eurodoc' section offered projects as diverse as *Leviathan* by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel (the current trendy film, perhaps too carefully designed to be so), *Volar* by Carla Subirana (a concise, impassive chronicle of life in a Spanish military academy) and *Mapa* by León Siminiani (a film diary that becomes a moving, bittersweet comedy); the first and last shared the award *ex aequo*.

But it was 'New Waves' that unearthed films that were elusive, mysterious and secretive, pointing towards a new type of fiction where everything is possible. The section's winner, *Arraianos* by Eloy Enciso, is a striking rural mosaic where the everyday becomes mythical. In *It Looks Pretty from a Distance*, by Anka and Wilhelm Sasnal, a shady rural story becomes a sophisticated narrative experiment. Unknown names, young filmmakers starting their careers in cinema, images that seize and disconcert... Seville could become a landmark of the festival circuit. We'll always come away from it knowing more about the state of things. ❧

Translated by Mar Diestro-Dópido



## PLAYING IN A DIFFERENT KEY

Films made by musicians often look beyond the remit of conventional filmmaking both in their form and subject-matter



**By Brad Stevens**

Of all artforms, film is surely the most accommodating, assimilating with apparent ease the visions of creators

usually associated with other disciplines. Cinema's history contains several distinguished bodies of work and memorable one-offs by theatrical actor/directors (Orson Welles, Laurence Olivier), novelists (Norman Mailer, Rebecca Miller), playwrights (Sam Shepard, David Mamet), poets (Jean Cocteau, Pier Paolo Pasolini), painters (Robert Longo, Julian Schnabel), photographers (Robert Frank, Larry Clark), dancers (Maya Deren, Wendy Toye), choreographers (Bob Fosse, Rob Marshall) and even comedians (Elaine May, Mike Nichols, Joan Rivers). And many directors initially achieved fame in other branches of filmmaking: actors (John Cassavetes, Clint Eastwood), screenwriters (Billy Wilder, Preston Sturges), cinematographers (Nicolas Roeg, Jack Cardiff), editors (Robert Wise, Hal Ashby) and producers (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Albert Lewin).

But I have a special affection for those films made by refugees from the world of British and American popular music, a group which includes such oddities as Jim Morrison's *HWY: An American Pastoral* (1969), John Lennon's *Imagine* (1972), Neil Young's *Journey Through the Past* (1973), Frank Zappa's *Baby Snakes* (1979), David Byrne's *True Stories* (1986), Prince's *Under the Cherry Moon* (1986) and Kate Bush's *The Line, the Cross and the Curve* (1993). What most clearly distinguishes these films from those by the aforementioned directors is their tendency to address audiences whose interests are assumed to lie outside the cinematic mainstream: one can appreciate *Hunger* (2008), *House of Games* (1987) and *Kids* (1995) even if one has never seen a painting by Steve McQueen, a play by David Mamet or a photograph by Larry Clark, but it seems doubtful that the films of Morrison et al will hold much interest for individuals not already familiar with their creators' musical achievements (there are exceptions to this rule, though they are mostly by singers who have already established careers as actors: Dick Powell, Frank Sinatra, Anthony Newley, Barbra Streisand). The aesthetics of these works have little or nothing to do with those of 'conventional' filmmaking, which perhaps explains why there are no sustained oeuvres here comparable with those of Mamet or Allen, but also suggests how the best of them expand cinema's potentialities by naively introducing *mise en scène* practices that feel fresh simply because they are derived from, and more properly belong to, musical forms.

An example of how the experiments conducted by these musician-directors can




**Blurred identities: Bob Dylan's 'Renaldo & Clara'**

exert a wider influence was provided by a recent BBC documentary on The Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967), in which Martin Scorsese pointed out that "there was something very musical, very dance-like about the editing of the 'Magical Mystery Tour' number on the bus. The freedom of the camera along with the restraint of the characters looking towards the lens... It's one of my favourite moments in movies. And that stayed with me over the years and I think actually, looking back at it, influenced a lot of the work I've done." The shots in question, which were probably directed by Paul McCartney, involve a camera moving rapidly through a bus as seated passengers stare directly into the lens. It's easy to see how this imagery influenced the Bamboo Lounge sequence in *Goodfellas* (1990), during which the men Henry Hill is describing in voiceover directly address a camera moving rapidly past them.

One thing all these films have in common is the director-performer's presence in front of as well as behind the camera, the auteur's physical body (rather than traditional narrative codes) serving to unify a disparate collection of materials (Mailer's *Maidstone*, Welles's *F for Fake* and Cocteau's *Le Testament d'Orphée* also function in this way, the last being this sub-genre's locus classicus). The outstanding achievement here is Bob Dylan's *Renaldo & Clara* (1977), which uses musical and poetic rhythms to link a story involving the two eponymous protagonists (played by Dylan and his then-wife Sara) with various improvised skits, concert performances (shot during Dylan's Rolling Thunder tour), backstage footage and documentary sequences (notably

*Musicians-turned-filmmakers introduce practices that feel fresh simply because they are derived from musical forms*

a lengthy section devoted to the imprisonment of boxer Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter), as well as several threads that refuse to slot easily into any category. Indeed, the breaking down of categories is the film's structural principle, with none of these elements existing independently of the others. And this ambitious structure reinforces what is clearly Dylan's central concern: the blurring of lines between one identity and another. Identity exists in a particularly fluid form, with Bob Dylan 'playing' a bewildering number of 'characters' and several of the onscreen participants vying for the 'role' of Bob Dylan (at one point musician Ronnie Hawkins is seen being interviewed by a journalist who has mistaken him for Dylan, and is even identified as 'Bob Dylan' in the end credits). Dylan's name thus becomes a label for a particular community and by extension a particular form of communal activity, existing in mid-to-late 1970s America only as the ghost of an ideal associated with the 1960s. Like so many works in this tradition, *Renaldo & Clara* has fallen through the gaps in our distribution systems, having been virtually invisible since it was screened on Channel 4 in 1983 (how appropriate that it should itself have become a ghost). And in many ways this masterpiece is deliberately positioned as a paradoxically problematic object: the further it burrows into Dylan's history, myth and persona, the more it alienates his fans; and the more it relies on musical rather than narrative methods of organisation, the more it resembles Jacques Rivette's *Out 1* (1971), another lengthy 'improvisation' that leans heavily on a non-cinematic model, experimental theatre, in order to deal with the legacy of a decade during which distinctions between 'genuine' and 'performed' identities were increasingly called into question. Though usually dismissed as artistic dead ends, these un- or extra- or perhaps even anti-cinematic works suggest exciting new directions for cinema to take. 



# CHINESE BOXES

Chris Petit's 1984 thriller plays with genre conventions in a Cold War setting, always keeping an eye out for 'termite' pleasures

**By Chris Darke**

Miss Peggy Lee holds the key to *Chinese Boxes*. Chris Petit's 1984 thriller is topped and tailed by a pair of scenes in a Berlin bar, a lovingly shot jukebox playing her cool-as-you-like take on Leiber and Stoller's 'Is That All There Is?' "Let's keep dancing, let's break out the boooooze" – the ideal signature song for this bleary, intoxicated dance of a film. Strong liquor and hard drugs spike the narrative. Langdon Marsh (Will Patton), an American drummer and small-time dope dealer on a stopover in the still-divided German city, becomes patsy and plaything for crime gangs and the Zone's American overlords.

Some tasty casting adds flesh to generic bones. Patton's disreputable boyishness makes him a credible innocent abroad. Gottfried John, fresh from Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980), is a lean and elegant German villain named Zwemmer, and Adelheid Arndt as Sarah is torn between the two of them. And the third man in this story of untrustworthy alliances on politically contested territory? A pre-*Cracker* Robbie Coltrane as Harwood, a bulky, Harry Lime-like shape-shifter, ostensibly an American security official ("I'm in Control") not above dirtying his hands among the smack-dealers.

All the elements, in other words, of a satisfying Cold War intrigue. Except that Petit is less interested in following a linear path than taking unexpected swerves. *Chinese Boxes* was his last conventionally made feature, the fourth in a run of films in which the generic elements of the thriller became increasingly abstract. While his debut *Radio On* (1979) was a road movie with a nominally investigative plot (a DJ follows up his brother's death), the next two films were more clearly generic. *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1981) was adapted from a P.D. James novel and *Flight to Berlin* (1983) was the first of two thrillers he made in Germany. By the time he came to make *Chinese Boxes*, Petit was describing it in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* as "an experiment in pure genre".

Which is where Peggy Lee comes in. *Chinese Boxes* can be seen now as a film that *dances* with the elements of the thriller genre. Double-cross, deadly love triangle, car chase and gunplay: each set-piece is treated as an autonomous routine, a gesture or flourish, to be given an unusual emphasis or interpretation. There's a scene in which Marsh and Sarah escape from a shoot-out in a speeding car. Marsh corners dangerously and the film cuts to another scene, cutting back only after the car has veered from the road: an upturned Audi in which the couple, laughing with relief, tumble into an upside-down clinch. No crash, but a kiss. The climactic death scene, in which Zwemmer, Marsh and Sarah's love triangle turns lethal, is shot as a woozy, horizontal waltz; the trio entwined on the barroom floor as the camera softly swings across their faces, Zwemmer



Two guys, a girl and a gun: Will Patton, Gottfried John and Adelheid Arndt in 'Chinese Boxes'

*Each set-piece is treated as a routine to be given an unusual flourish: the car chase ends not with a crash but a kiss*

expiring with the words "Ich bin ein Berliner!"

This is an 80s film, of course (executive-produced by Stephen Woolley and Nik Powell of Palace, no less) – which is to say, one made at the height of postmodernism, when thrillers were busily being outfitted in pastiche

## WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

"Despite the contingencies of low-budget filming – bold colour camera-work and blatant post-synchronisation – there is more fun to be had here than in the current British infatuation for the Laura Ashley school of film-making."


**David Pirie, 'Time Out', 1985**

"The film is overloaded with shadowy, confused and unresolved plotting... But this action never has any basis in motivation, with the result that the characters seem 'one-dimensional'... If there is a single dominant spirit behind 'Chinese Boxes' it might well be that of Fritz Lang. Not the 'great' Lang of the first German or American periods, but the stateless Lang of the last Mabuse and 'Tiger' films, those dubbed-for-foreign-sales reworkings of already familiar material."

**Steve Jenkins, 'Monthly Film Bulletin', May 1985**

noir styles, and this might go some way to explaining Petit's abstraction of the genre.

But there's another way of looking at this aspect of *Chinese Boxes*. Petit was a critic before he made films and was influenced by Manny Farber, the great American critic who celebrated the "termite art" of B movies over the "white elephant art" of self-importantly 'significant' films. Farber's vision of 'termite art' is mostly a matter of moments, what he called "a few spots of tingling, jarring excitement" winning out over the pursuit of harmony and continuity. Petit has returned to the idea of the 'termite moment' in his subsequent career. In a piece written for this magazine, entitled 'Flickers', he listed the filmic moments that have burrowed their way obdurately into his memory; he also made an excellent BBC video-essay on Farber, *Negative Space* (1999).

So *Chinese Boxes* can now be seen as the first instance of what would become a kind of termite continuity across Petit's work. And, almost 30 years on, it too has its own 'moments' that stick in the mind beyond those dance-like genre flourishes asserted by the director. A shop sign that reads 'Schmuck'. An early videogame console, beeping like an abandoned robot pet. A strung-out, 15-year-old diplomat's daughter ("baby junk"), feral and intensely vulnerable. Marsh killing time in Zwemmer's empty flat, trying to get comfortable on a bed, fidgeting like a photo-model between shots. And the film's final scene: Marsh and Sarah's farewell on a deserted airport plaza, filmed from a high angle, like two dancers breaking and walking away from one another across the lonely floor. 

## TALKING POINTS

## NEWS ON THE MARCH

Up until the 1970s, the newsreel, with its stentorian tone and top-down sensibility, had become shorthand for the patronising, patrician voice of the establishment. Yet as a new wave of 21st-century protest movements takes shape, filmmakers around the world are finding the newsreel format to be the perfect vehicle for bottom-up documentation and reportage in the digital era. We hear from three directors who have each come to the form independently and, overleaf, revisit the story of 20th-century British newsreels



Finger on the pulse: Alex Reuben's 'Newsreel'

### By Kieron Corless

*If I have a secret ambition, it is to be put in charge of the French newsreel service. All of my films have been reports on the state of the nation; they are newsreel documents, treated in a personal manner perhaps, but in terms of contemporary actuality.*  
Jean-Luc Godard

Newsreels seem to be making a comeback. In the last few months alone, I've stumbled across three filmmakers in three different countries – Jem Cohen in the US, Alex Reuben in the UK and Sylvain George in France – who, independently of and unbeknownst to each other, have fixed on newsreels as a vehicle for exploring that 'contemporary actuality' Godard refers to, in the process charging up the format and giving it renewed currency. There are doubtless many more I'm unaware of, especially in the Arab world.

It may seem a strange choice of format to those who remember the old Pathé and

Gaumont newsreels that used to show in cinemas: with their RP accents and pompously upbeat tone, they sounded stuffy and remote, the amplified voice of the establishment, their ideological agenda and subtexts perennially suspect (not unlike today's TV news coverage, in fact).

Overleaf, BFI curator Rebecca Vick gives a nuanced historical account of the British newsreel, but in light of the new tendencies I want to highlight, it's also worth recalling an equally vast and compelling lineage of (sometimes state-sponsored) politically militant newsreels: Dziga Vertov and others in the wake of the Russian revolution; the Newsreel Collective in the States; Santiago Alvarez in Cuba; various currents in France through Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin and others; and those lyrical, surreally inflected documentary chronicles of the everyday purveyed by the likes of Humphrey Jennings, a colossal inspiration for both Reuben and Cohen.

But why now? In the case of Cohen and George, the triggers were Occupy Wall Street and the Spanish 15-M movement respectively; for Alex Reuben, several London protests sit alongside portraits of local communities. Central to each undertaking is a desire not to propagandise but to honour complex realities and counter simplifying and politically partisan media-imposed narratives; to bear witness and pay homage to ordinary people of every stripe imbued with a spirit of revolt in the wake of the financial crisis; to build an archive for the future of potentially overlooked moments, of battles fought and lost, to capture history being made from below; to immerse viewers in those moments and get something out there fast, using all currently available distribution networks. Despite the speed and urgency, they're still clearly the work of established filmmakers operating pretty much on their own, crafted and therefore distinct from the endless mobile-phone coverage on YouTube.



## JEM COHEN

I had gone to Occupy Wall Street on the very first day, 17 September 2011, shot a little bit of a street parade, just for my own records, and was rather disappointed in the event. I left right before they parked in Zuccotti Park. I thought, "This isn't going to be anything." Then I started to revisit and, within a week, felt that I had been wrong and something very interesting was brewing. So I started to shoot, at that point in HD, but still had no outlet for it.

Then I had a conversation by chance with John Vanco, who programmes at the IFC Center in New York. He said, "What are filmmakers doing?" And I said, "Well, this is one of the most documented events I've ever encountered, but frankly the documentation is mostly going to be geared towards advocacy/propaganda films for, and then probably the same against." And he said, "Well, where are the newsreels?" I said to him, "If I get you newsreels, will you show them as newsreels?" He invited them to play at the IFC, which has five screens. So that was an extraordinary opportunity, and I have to give credit to John Vanco for sparking it.

I knew that even though it was right there in Lower Manhattan, a lot of people would never experience it, and the idea that people would randomly enter the movie theatre and have a sudden three- or five-minute immersion in this experience was more interesting to me than just showing it to the people already involved. But the newsreel idea also ties in to a certain tradition, not necessarily with newsreels specifically but [in terms of] people like John Ford making films for the US government or Humphrey Jennings for the British war effort, and of course Chris Marker – the connection with the early Russians and the propaganda trains, that whole Vertov/Medvedkin schema. I also used the term 'newsreels' with a grain of salt: I wasn't trying to pattern them literally on newsreels as we know them, which usually are quite propagandistic.

My intention was to make a non-propagandistic newsreel based around observation and an experiential sense of what it was like to be there. On one hand, I was a supporter and wanted to become a participant, and to me that became very powerful and moving. It took me by surprise because I'm usually cynical about these things. But the documentarian filmmaker side of me just isn't interested in making advocacy tools in the way that the Left usually manufactures them. I'm glad someone else does them, but it's not what I do. The basis of a newsreel is the 'you are there' sensibility. It basically says, "There's an event happening right now, or it's just happened, somewhere in the world that you're not, and here's what it's like." And that to me was the guiding principle, simply to create these little documents that had humility and respect but would also allow for some ambiguity and even ambivalence.

I had to make them very quickly to turn them around for the theatre. They ran the first

five and then the camp at Zuccotti Park was eradicated, and by that time I had about five or six more. So I went and made a series of 12, and now they're having a different life in different channels. But it really was nice to be making something that functioned as newsreels traditionally functioned, before feature films.

## SYLVAIN GEORGE

*Vers Madrid (The Burning Bright)!* is a film that arose in response to circumstances, specifically in relation to the political events and social and political mobilisations taking place in Spain for more than a year now. When what became known as the 15-M protest movement began, just after the Arab Spring in 2011, I wondered, like many people, whether it was the first revolution of the 21st century in Western society. I felt the desire to see and understand what was happening so I went to Madrid as fast as possible to try to shoot some images without any intention of making a film. I didn't know the city, was not acquainted with anybody there and didn't speak the language at all. I just wanted to be there.

Once there, I was completely taken by the atmosphere that prevailed in the main square, by the energy that was being unleashed. I thought it was incredible that people could talk about politics like that. You could see gatherings in neighbourhoods, groups of people who didn't know each other assembling to talk politics on the squares and in the streets adjacent to the Puerta del Sol. As for the rallies, in all my life I had never been able to attend collective gatherings of up to 10,000 people!

I tried to be as close as possible to what was happening, to testify to what appeared to me to be very important. Gradually, I gathered material. Then I came to think that some of it was sufficiently interesting to try to make something with it. As I worked, I tried to find a form suited to my approach, the desire to go

*These films aim not to propagandise but to honour complex realities, to bear witness and pay homage*



A Jem Cohen newsreel

on site, the absence of production [equipment], the fact that I couldn't make a work of 'immersion' or be involved in a long drawn-out job on the site, as I was able to do for *May They Rest in Revolt (Figures of Wars I)* and *The Outbursts (My Mouth, My Revolt, My Name)*.

I quickly thought of working on a form that would update the idea of the newsreel, such as Robert Kramer had proposed and worked on – a form that echoes approaches such as early-20th-century Russian Kino, Dziga Vertov's cine-tracts or Medvedkin's experiments; but a form that also echoes images shot with a mobile phone or a small camera that one can see posted on the internet by people in revolt or those who wish to bear witness.

It also seemed to me that newsreels could be an interesting tool to explore the fact that disinformation is widespread in Spain. The big Spanish media are in the pay of power; they distort reality and don't report what really goes on in the square or the neighbourhood committees. Similarly, the French media say very little about what happens in Spain or about the Occupy movements around the world. Using the newsreel form helps to turn dialectics upside down and present absent or missing elements. That's what I tried to do: to present modestly and in an extremely spontaneous and essential way a certain number of things that are at stake – necessities – as well making my own contribution to the 'Spanish revolution'.

## ALEX REUBEN

With *Newsreel* I wanted to show how you can shoot and put work in the cinema immediately – I guess it's a kind of punk ethos. New technology allows this fluidity with high quality. It doesn't cost a lot of money and high quality. It doesn't cost a lot of money and Eisenstein didn't have Final Cut Pro! As producers and directors we don't have so many excuses. I don't have a magic wand yet Picturehouse [cinemas] put on both *Routes* (my first film) and *Newsreel* without any film-festival or distributor channel. At one point, *Newsreel* was in three cinemas every day in London – two more on a non-daily basis – and I think there's a political point in the fact that a little independent filmmaker can do it.




'Vers Madrid (The Burning Bright)!'


For me, they're very political films. There was the banking crisis – I was shooting right around then – and then there were two marches against the cuts. They were the three main events. And what's interesting is asking what the zeitgeist is; what's the feeling on the street? And then, how do you communicate that feeling in a way other than via a voiceover? Newsreels are beautiful: they can be quite poetic and it's a way of putting process on screen. And it really is the news, but it's a different kind of news to how we normally see events portrayed.

In terms of the politics, there's a small 'p' and a big 'P'. The big 'P' would be the definite presence of the protests, the banners and all these things. Then there's a small 'p', which is about individual expression – and which, for me, is especially about dance and music and movement. There is a structure to *Newsreel*, but it's maybe more to do with movement. I don't want to make it appear like it's thrown together; there is a sense of rhythm and

*People are moved by these films. It's to do with seeing ourselves on the streets, how people walk. That's the story of our lives*

progression. There's no point just putting three protests next to each other because people are going to get bored. The editing process is long and hard – hours and hours and hours finding how these things work together. I could have had a lot more protest in there. I took some violence out, for example. I tried to communicate the emotion of ordinary people marching, which is what it was about for me, not a few people fighting or causing trouble.

People have been moved, with *Routes* and now with *Newsreel*. And this is odd. Because if you say to someone after they've seen a film where there's a lot of talking, "Why were you moved?", they can say, "Oh, when so-and-so lost his wife, or when she lost her child." They can't do that for my films. So then you have this really interesting conversation where people struggle to articulate it. But we get there, because I've done so many Q&As. It's to do with the fact that they are narrative films and the narrative is this cumulative sense of emotion that comes through from bodies and movement and events. But it's especially to do with body language and sound and music. Most people don't see that consciously – I know what they are, but when people watch the film they don't. And in *Newsreel* it's also to do with seeing ourselves on the streets, just seeing how people walk and express body language in normal situations. That's the story of our lives. These things are more important than words, and I guess I take words out because there's a lot of bullshit about. People are less likely to lie with their bodies. 

 **Alex Reuben's 'Newsreel' screens at the ICA Cinema, London, on 15 January, followed by a Q&A. 'Vers Madrid' and Jem Cohen's newsreels will screen at the same venue later in the month**

## WINDOWS ON THE WORLD

Almost as old as cinema itself, newsreels were for decades the newspapers of the film world

By Rebecca Vick

A pulsing vein of information, current affairs and entertainment marked by clipped-voice commentaries, dramatic music and rapid editing, newsreel was cinema's most iconic form of factual filmmaking. A forerunner of today's news on demand, it offered cinemagoers a unique window on their world: whether showing a speech by Churchill, the activities of the royal family or the suffragettes, a cricket match at Lord's or an eyewitness account from the Front, newsreel kept a nation's heart racing.

French-based Gaumont and Eclair were the earliest known sources of this new mass-produced form. Cheap to reproduce, newsreels were simultaneously screened in multiple venues. They eventually averaged five minutes and contained five or six stories.

The first successful British reel was Pathé's *Animated Gazette*, starting in June 1910. Pathé, along with Gaumont and Topical Budget, dominated the silent era but there were numerous other newsreel production companies, including Warwick Bioscope Chronicle and Williamson's *Animated News*. In the sound era, single reels doubled in length and each issue included eight or more items.

Their birth coinciding with the newspaper revolution, as 'animated newspapers' or 'topicals' borrowed from print formats, referring to themselves as the 'picture papers' of the moving-picture world. Two editions were released weekly, on Mondays and Thursdays, an integral part of the balanced diet of the full cinema bill; the title of cameraman Paul Wyand's autobiography reminds us that newsreels were 'Useless, If Delayed'. But they often weren't quite on the pulse for practical reasons: the heavy equipment restricted cameramen's ability to cover stories, image quality varied with weather conditions, and slow processing and budget limitations prompted heavy reliance on stock footage.

The silent newsreel lacked the broadsheets' context, immediacy and analytical content but its intertitles – headlines – were easily translated into many languages and they reached a broader audience than the printed word. Sometimes incorporating up to 70 per cent foreign content, newsreels remain compelling partly for their internationalism.

Many companies fell in the transition from silence to sound, but Pathé and Gaumont persisted, alongside new entrants such as British Paramount News, Universal News and British Movietone News, whose film of the Epsom Derby was the subject of Britain's first sound newsreel in June 1929. Between them, these five organisations developed the now-familiar newsreel form.

In the shift from silence to sound, some companies initially produced both versions; others incorporated background noises while continuing to deploy captions. Commentaries




Making the news: a Gaumont British team at work

efficiently conveyed information in the limited time available, sometimes galloping along at three times the average speed of speech. Pathé's Bob Danvers-Walker, Universal's R.E. Jeffrey and Movietone's Leslie Mitchell became familiar voices, while Ted Emmett's authoritative voiceovers for Gaumont became so iconic that one journalist described him as "just about the only star name the newsreels ever made".

Historian Nicholas Pronay argues that soundtracks gave newsreels access to the "life-blood of journalism": politics and especially politicians' speeches. Editors could use this tool to address and persuade the audience; the absence of a politician from a report could be as telling as their presence. Different ideological slants have been discerned in different outputs, Pathé leaning slightly left, Movietone right.

Historian Anthony Aldgate wrote of newsreel companies being "permeated by ways of seeing and thinking which belonged to the dominant structures of power... which supported the dominant political consensus of the day". Newsreels were uniquely exempt from the censorship imposed on other parts of the film industry – a freedom that led in turn to criticism and questioning of their motives. Producers trod carefully, balancing editorial independence with sensitivities of exhibitors and audiences, though more frivolous items added to entertain crowds and appease renters were widely disparaged.

In times of threat, an umbrella organisation, the Newsreel Association of Great Britain and Ireland, worked to resolve industry-wide problems and promote and protect shared interests. During the war, producers were integrated into national power structures, harnessed for propaganda and morale-boosting. The companies joined forces in a rota system, allowing them all to cover agreed stories without duplication. Live events were planned, rehearsed and re-enacted and stock footage re-used; Pronay has argued that newsreels therefore created the "illusion of actuality".

In the 1950s, tastes changed, audiences became more questioning, production costs rose and editors' fingers slipped from the pulse. Cinemas ceased taking newsreels as they were overtaken by television, whose less heavy cameras caught more interesting stories. Most newsreels disappeared by the end of the 1960s, though Movietone held out until 1979. Yet even at this distance, the look, sound and feel of newsreel remain instantly recognisable to the public, and continue to resonate with some of today's filmmakers. 



# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN  
Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: [S&S@bfi.org.uk](mailto:S&S@bfi.org.uk)

## Shine on

Dr Neil Jackson is wrong to suggest ('Letter of the Month', *S&S*, January) that the publicity for the BFI's release of *The Shining* (US cut) was "somewhat misleading". His argument with regard to a limited number of TV transmissions is based on a misunderstanding of the term 'released', which is generally taken to refer to the widespread distribution of a film in cinemas and/or on DVD. The BFI was correct to say that the US cut of *The Shining* had never previously been released in UK cinemas. Our publicity also stressed the tremendous impact of Kubrick's feature on the big screen, and we are delighted that the US cut has now been seen in more than 150 cinemas across the UK.

**Margaret Deriaz**, Head of Film Distribution,  
British Film Institute

## Cad reputation

I would be wary of falling in with Giles Coren's reading of Severine's death scene in *Skyfall* (Editorial, *S&S*, January). Bond wants to save her but will be shot if he makes the least move. His callous quip about the murder being a waste of good scotch is purely a trick, feigned insouciance being Bond's only way to make his captors lower their guard so he can spring a surprise attack. Everyone I ask takes that to be the point of the line.

**Patrick Fahy**, Documentation Team Leader,  
British Film Institute

## In defence of popular Yugoslav cinema

Knowing the excellent standards of film criticism in *S&S*, I was surprised by the ignorance and cultural arrogance which radiate from the review of *Cinema Komunisto* (*S&S*, December). Hannah McGill criticises the author of the film, Mila Turajlic, for seeing political intervention in Yugoslav cinema as "sweet and amusing rather than sinister"; she defines the Yugoslav official film industry as "insignificant".

McGill's text unfortunately displays the typical failure of many Western film scholars who observe the history of Eastern European cinema through the simplified dichotomy: dissident modernist mavericks vs regime cinema. I doubt that such a dichotomy works well in Poland and Hungary, but it doesn't work at all in the Yugoslav case.

During its 45-year history, Yugoslav cinema produced a broad variety of thrillers, crime movies, war films, comedies and melodramas within that very same party-controlled apparatus, but some were nevertheless great films. Yugoslav directors of classic narrative style such as Branko Bauer, France Stiglic, Nikola Tanhofer, Hajrudin Krvavac or Zika Mitrovic do not fit into a Western pattern of dissidents, but they are truly relevant filmmakers. For Yugoslav cinema they have the same role as Ford, Hawks or Wilder have for American culture.

What's more relevant is that these films are

## LETTER OF THE MONTH REINVENTING ARGENTINA



Happy as I was to see the Narcisa Hirsch retrospective at this year's Viennale reviewed in a two-page feature ('Restless Reinvention', *Wide Angle*, *S&S*, January), my joy was soon spoiled by Olaf Möller's rather peculiar take on Argentine cinema and history. Does Ms Hirsch (above) really "like to point out" that "during the 1970s and 1980s the lieutenants and generals weren't the only ones exercising

quasi-official terror: left-wing extremists had their own death squads"? However aberrant and ill-conceived the strategy of armed resistance against 20-odd years of military dictatorship might seem with the benefit of hindsight, to compare this to the systematic torture and assassination of tens of thousands of people at the hands of the Junta is a bit like saying: "Hey, after all the Jews and Commies also tried to kill the Führer not once but twice, didn't they?"

Whatever the veteran cineaste might have said – and one truly hopes she might have intended something slightly different from what your chronicler reports – "the kind of atmosphere in which Hirsch started to make films" in the late 1960s was certainly not one, as Möller suggests, of unblemished, experimental autonomy under siege from left and right-wing "death squads". And as for "a nation not known for this [experimental] variety of cinema": at least in my version of Latin American cinema, the work of Solanas/Getino, Gleyzer, Birri, Alberto Fischerman, Hugo Santiago or – closer to Hirsch's own – of a veteran film-artist such as Claudio Caldini represents one of the richest legacies of experimental cinema anywhere in the region. But then perhaps one needs a concept of experimentalism as wide as Mr Möller's command of Argentine (film) history to truly appreciate his insights.

**Jens Andermann**, Zurich

still broadly popular in all Yugoslav countries – more so than those of internationally famous authors like Makavejev and Kusturica. I am a Croat; Turajlic is a Serb, 20 years younger than me; but the fact that we both consider Yugoslav popular cinema as our mutual heritage shows how these films transcend national and generational boundaries. Instead of criticising those who study this cinema with affection, Western critics should make an effort to learn more about it. For a start, I'd suggest they see Branko Bauer's *Don't Look Back, My Son* (1956), one of the best thrillers of the 1950s, in any cinema, in any country.

**Jurica Pavicic**, University of Split, Croatia

## In defence of 'Twilight'

A feature of contemporary film franchises is that each film assumes its audience is familiar with the earlier episodes. Clearly Hannah McGill (*The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part II*, Reviews, *S&S*, January) has not been following the *Twilight* films, or she would know that all the actors who are seen and named in the final credits had important roles in the previous movies – making this closing sequence a coda to the whole saga. Her description of Bella's experience of motherhood as "bloodless" is also ironic,

given the Caesarean birth of her daughter in the previous film (which apparently had some male filmgoers fainting in the aisles).

Unfortunately, McGill also fails to notice scenes in the very film she is watching. She complains that no one consumes any blood. Did she not see Bella, having narrowly restrained herself from feasting on a rock-climbing tourist, rushing to wrestle a mountain lion to the forest floor and guzzle on its blood? Admittedly, this is shown in long-shot, to accord with the film's 12A certificate (the scene is far more graphic in the novel).

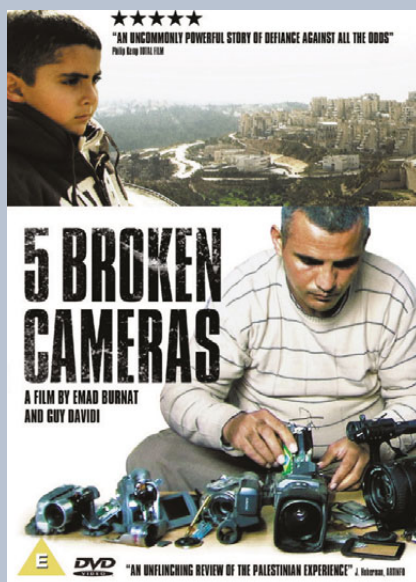
Ridiculing *Twilight* has become a competitive sport for giggling critics who misrepresent the stories to accord with their prejudices.

**Peter Benson**, London

## Additions and corrections

**January** p. 73, Soundings: the screening of *Orochi* with *benshi* narration was presented by Ciné Illuminé, not Silent London as stated; p.82 *Hors Satan*, Certificate 15, 109m 46s, 9,879 ft +0 frames; p.86 *Life of Pi* – some screenings presented in 3D; p.90 *Boxing Day*, Certificate 15, 94m 9s, 8,473 ft +8 frames; p.92 *Chasing Ice*, Certificate 12A, 80m 11s, 7,216 ft +8 frames; p.94 *Confession of a Child of the Century*, Certificate 15, 120m 12s, 10,818 ft +0 frames; *Dead Europe*, the actor pictured is Kodi Smit-McPhee, not Marton Csokas as stated; p.101 *McCullin*, Certificate 15, 95m 15s, 8,572 ft +8 frames; p.104 *Neil Young Journeys*, Certificate PG, 87m 8s, 7,842 ft +0 frames; p.106 *Safety Not Guaranteed*, Certificate 15, 85m 32s, 7,698 ft +0 frames; p.109 *Smashed*, Certificate 15, 80m 53s, 7,279 ft +8 frames  
**December 2012** p.94 *The House I Live In*, Certificate 15, 108m 52s, 9,798 ft +0 frames

# new wave films on DVD



## 5 Broken Cameras

Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi

Winner of audience prizes at festivals around the world, and long-listed for an Oscar, *5 Broken Cameras* is the story of one West Bank Palestinian village's resistance to occupation and land-grabs for neighbouring Israeli settlements, but told via the footage of Emad Burnat who originally bought a camera to document the early years of his son. A daring amalgam of the personal and political.

★★★★★

'A powerful personal testimony... material that never makes the nightly news' **Peter Bradshaw**  
**The Guardian**

'One of the best, most involving documentaries of recent years... It presents with overwhelming power a case of injustice on a massive scale.'

**Philip French, The Observer**

★★★★★

'Could scarcely be more real or more wrenching.'

**Anthony Quinn**  
**The Independent**

Available 28 January on DVD and download



## Elena

Andrei Zvyagintsev

This, the third film from the director of *The Return*, won the Certain Regard Special Jury Prize in Cannes, and Nadezhda Markina as *Elena* has also won several Best Actress awards for her performance. Elena and Vladimir are unequal partners in their 2nd marriage, he rich, she a former nurse. When Vladimir has a heart-attack, Elena realises she must act to safeguard the future of her family.

★★★★★

'The subtlety and stealth of this movie is a marvel... superbly shot and directed... deeply satisfying'

**Peter Bradshaw**

**The Guardian**

★★★★★

'A sensational Russian drama... has the taut dramatic structure of a Dostoevsky parable.'

**Tim Robey**

**The Daily Telegraph**

★★★★★

'This is smart, gripping cinema.'

**Dave Calhoun**  
**Time Out**

Available 11 February on DVD, Blu-ray and download

● Includes an interview with Andrei Zvyagintsev

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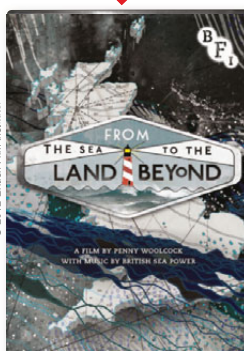
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# Reviews



## 104 **Les Misérables**

*But for all the recreation of vast period sets, director Tom Hooper's trump card is his use of prolonged close-ups, bringing viewers to the performers' inner torments with a proximity that is more intimate and unflinching than anything achievable on stage*



**80** Films of the month



**88** Films



**112** Home Cinema



**122** Books

## Antiviral

Canada/France 2012

Director: Brandon Cronenberg

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"She's perfect somehow," says Syd March (Caleb Landry Jones), selling a dream to his rapt customer – and like the best salesmen, Syd believes his own pitch, even if that "somehow" allows for certain flaws. With his designer suit and scarf, slicked-back hair and consummately delivered patter, Syd seems to embody the very perfection that he is peddling – were it not for the freckles that cover his alabaster skin, emblems of an individual's wear and tear. *Antiviral* is itself for the most part a brightly lit film of sterile sheens, with all the idealised allure of an expensive commercial – and yet there is also the constant reminder that all these shimmering, seductive surfaces conceal defects and disease.

The film opens with a brilliant whiteness filling the screen, only for the camera to pull back and reveal Syd sitting in front of a white billboard, a thermometer in his mouth. The billboard is advertising the Lucas Clinic, Syd's place of work, which, for all its promise of a glossy experience "for the true connoisseur" (accompanied by an enlarged picture of a celebrity's immaculate face), deals only in the illness and vulnerability for which Syd is here presented as literal poster boy, eager to conceal his inner sickness with a suave, professional exterior. The Clinic clones and copy-protects viruses harvested from celebrities with whom it has exclusive contracts, and then injects those viruses into paying clients who desire to come that much closer to the objects of their obsession – while, lower down the social scale, the less respectable, barely legal 'meat market' sells steaks and other cuts of flesh that have been cultivated from celebrities' cells. These are perverse forms of communion through shared malady or cannibalised consumption, where the real pathology being allegorised and satirised is celebrity culture itself, so that *Antiviral*, though set in a darkly surreal future, ends up dissecting the ills of the present.

Syd takes his work home with him, smuggling out the Clinic's latest viruses in his own bloodstream and removing their copy-protection on an illegal console in his apartment so he can sell them on to the black market. Syd's status as double-dealing agent, fluidly passing between different worlds – the Clinic, the meat market, the hermetic life of a celebrity – is the hinge upon which the film's convoluted thriller plot pivots, as Syd must race to find a cure for the deadly synthetic virus that he has inadvertently admitted into his body. Of course, Syd's desperate investigation also exposes a self-perpetuating system in which celebrities and their adoring fans alike are cynically (and sickly) exploited by commercialised medical operations that have little interest in their clients' genuine wellbeing. Syd's own part in this system, as at once puppet, middleman, engineer and addict, reflects the duplicitous part we all play in a culture that we both feed and devour every time our eyes are drawn to the image of a celebrity's face.

"Maybe you feel what I feel," Dr Abendroth (Malcolm McDowell) tells Syd, referring to the

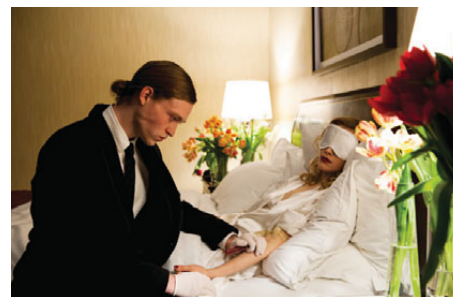


Poster boy: Syd (Caleb Landry Jones) gets an intimate perspective on the sickly side of celebrity

quasi-religious charge he derives from wearing a skin graft taken from his celebrity patient, Hannah Geist (Sarah Gadon), "or maybe you're really just another fan." Abendroth is right to discern that, far from being a mere courier of Hannah's disease, Syd has a very personal stake in the pathologies he traffics, yet the doctor deludes himself in supposing that the skin-deep bond he has himself forged with Hannah is really so different from others' worshipful yearning. Abendroth wants only what all fans want: a sense of intimate, exclusive connection with a chosen icon. Similarly the dream that Syd sells so slickly in the Clinic's consultation rooms will turn out also to be his own private fantasy, shown on screen in vivid dream sequences before being realised in ever more macabre variations. Here, bodily penetration is conducted and bodily fluids exchanged through the medium of syringes in a controlled, clinical setting, and yet the ecstatic merging of self with other remains everyone's elusive object – and so theology is imperfectly reduced to science, and the erotic is made fleshily monstrous.

Indeed, as blood is let, infected and consumed, *Antiviral* establishes itself as a

very modern take on the vampire myth, with hypodermics substituting for fangs as well as phallus. The film's striking colour scheme – all those harsh white surfaces, soon, inevitably, to be corrupted by the contrasting splatter of blood and bodily tissue – is suggestive of the pale skins and sanguineous issues that dominate the vampire genre, while its ending is rather unequivocal in the way it casts Syd as a bloodsucker, seeking to assimilate to himself something of Hannah's *Geist* (her surname is the German word for 'spirit' or 'ghost') from the grotesquely preserved remains of her otherwise



Veinglorious: Caleb Landry Jones



# THE LUCAS

## or the true conr



*Brandon Cronenberg maintains the bloodline inherited from his father, David, while giving the new flesh a different, distorted face*

been occupying himself with the period psychodrama of *A Dangerous Method* (2011) or the socioeconomic parable of *Cosmopolis* (2012), other writer/directors have been busily revisiting the old spirit that marked his earlier works. So Vincenzo Natali's *Splice* (2009) and Eron Sheean's *Errors of the Human Body* (2012), both dark family tragedies addressing contemporary anxieties about genetic science, come clad in the sort of cerebral SF grue that was once Cronenberg's specialty, while Panos Cosmatos's defiantly backward-looking *Beyond the Black Rainbow* (2010) plays like a fetishistic pastiche of all Cronenberg's 1980s output. First-time writer/director Brandon Cronenberg not only has a special claim to his father's legacy but also proves himself a worthy heir. The chilly dystopian setting (in Toronto!) of *Antiviral*, the transgressive sexuality, the repellent body horror, the sinister corporations, even the casting of Gadon (who also featured in both *A Dangerous Method* and *Cosmopolis*), all unapologetically evoke the films of Cronenberg Sr.

Still, the father's tropes are being appropriated to tell a new, different story. If the vision of Syd's body merged with metal tubing, as seen in a febrile fantasy sequence, recalls the mutating antihero of David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), it also prefigures both Hannah's awful fate and Syd's own role as an individual cog in a sinister machine. And so the younger Cronenberg maintains his inherited bloodline while giving the new flesh a different, distorted face. Growing gradually sicker and messier along with its conflicted protagonist, *Antiviral* is, in all its icily unpleasant ickiness, indeed perfect somehow. **B**

dead and entombed body. Yet while *Antiviral* is certainly a welcome addition to the recent revival in vampire films, its adult concepts and deromanticised squeamishness make it less companion piece than antidote to the likes of the *Twilight* franchise, even as it concerns itself with the kind of manically devoted fanaticism recognisable in any 'Twi-hard'. The fact that the viruses are like films – able to be commercially reproduced, (inadequately) engineered to prevent piracy, and themselves encoding the lives of their celebrity 'stars' – only adds to the impression that the film's preoccupations are in part metacinematic. It hardly seems a coincidence that one of *Antiviral*'s more repellent characters, Levine (James Cade), is a filmmaker and a pornographer, transforming human vicissitudes into vicarious spectacles for personal consumption and recruiting the viewer's gaze to narcissistic, masturbatory acts of objectified identification. For *Antiviral* too invites us into its idealised world of fabricated feelings and fantasies – although at the same time, by exposing that world's horrific machinery, it keeps us at a distance.

Even as David Cronenberg has of late

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Niv Fichman  
**Written by**  
Brandon Cronenberg  
**Director of Photography**  
Karim Hussain  
**Edited by**  
Matthew Hannam  
**Production Designer**  
Arvinder Grewal  
**Music**  
E.C. Woodley

**Sound Mixer**  
Phil Stall  
**Costume Designer**  
Patrick Antosh

©Rhombus Media  
(Antiviral) Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
Alliance Films and TF1  
International present  
with the participation  
of Telefilm Canada

and the Ontario  
Media Development  
Corporation a  
Rhombus Media  
production  
Produced with the  
assistance of the  
Ontario Film and  
Television Tax Credit,  
Canadian Film or  
Video Production  
Tax Credit  
Produced in

association with The  
Movie Network  
**Executive Producers**  
Mark Slone  
Victor Loewy

**Cast**  
**Caleb Landry Jones**  
Syd March  
**Sarah Gadon**  
Hannah Geist  
**Douglas Smith**

Edward Porris  
**Joe Pingue**  
Arvid  
**Nicholas Campbell**  
Dorian  
**Sheila McCarthy**  
Dev Harvey  
**Wendy Crewson**  
Mira Tesser  
**Malcolm McDowell**  
Dr Abendroth  
**James Cade**  
Levine

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Distributor**  
Momentum Pictures

Toronto, the future. Syd March is a salesman and technician at the Lucas Clinic, which, for a price, infects fans with viruses cloned from celebrities under exclusive contract. Syd also smuggles viruses out, decoding their copy protection on an illegal console in his apartment and selling them on to black marketeer Arvid. When his colleague Derek is caught doing the same, Syd is reassigned to extract a blood sample from ailing celebrity Hannah Geist. Injecting himself with her blood, Syd collapses. He wakes to news of Hannah's death. Increasingly ill, Syd requests spare parts for his broken console from Arvid, whose colleague, celebrity pornographer Levine, forcibly extracts samples from Syd.

Syd learns that Hannah is still alive, infected with a

deadly synthetic virus, sourced from the Lucas Clinic, which can destroy consoles on contact. For Hannah's sake and his own, Syd agrees to investigate. He traces the virus back to Derek. Syd is abducted by Levine, who wants to record for Hannah's fans the final stages of the disease that Syd alone shares with her. Syd escapes from what he realises is the clinic of Lucas rivals Vole & Tesser. Mira Tesser admits that she had Hannah infected with Derek's virus, hoping to capitalise on the virus's patent. With Hannah now beyond hope of recovery, Syd pitches a proposal.

Mira unveils the 'Afterlife Capsule', in which Hannah's remaining tissues are harvested and reinfected to create exclusive new viruses. Left alone with the capsule, Syd licks Hannah's blood.

## Bullhead

Belgium/The Netherlands 2011

Director: Michaël R. Roskam

### Reviewed by Paul Tickell

The landscape of the opening shots of *Bullhead* is familiar from the Flemish borderlands and areas of northern France seen in the films of Bruno Dumont and the Dardennes. But it's also different because it is quickly apparent that we are in a very specific part of Belgium, in its eastern region near Limburg. An ominous voiceover encourages us to see the misty autumnal countryside as a mythical site. The ploughed fields, fringed by dark woods, signify an agriculture of the damned where secrets lie buried. This place, in short, is "fucked" and will be "until the end of time".

The voiceover also takes us inside the workaday world of farmer Jacky Vanmarsenille, and inside his head. To begin with, it's his physique more than his psyche that is striking – literally, in that in the opening sequence he's roughing up another farmer. This hapless guy had better keep doing business with Jacky, or else. The 'or else' is the bull-like build that Jacky's clothes struggle to contain, and it's there too in his walk away from the intimidated farmer. Now, as debut director Michaël R. Roskam slows down the action, we see coming towards the camera a classic case of the 'roid rage' which at any moment might burst forth from Jacky's highly muscled frame, as much the product of anabolic steroids as diet and gym. The gait of such muscle men will always feel like a stage walk, theatrically conjuring up the idea of power and violence. But the macho narcissism isn't all gazing at the navel punctuating the six-pack: real damage can be done to your fellow man – and woman. In fact, by the end of the film, that walk of Jacky's is more like a stalk as he goes after the woman who, 20 years earlier, had been the girl of his adolescent dreams.

He literally picks up her scent again when he visits her *parfumerie* on the pretext of buying aftershave. The film, with its conventional narrative structure, is no cinema of extremes but it does constantly deploy uncomfortable if not downright disturbing scenes, and this is one of them: the beast in a shop dedicated to olfactory beauty. Old Spice-ing up the

viewer's discomfort is the fact that Lucia Schepers doesn't recognise Jacky. We have earlier learned from a long horrific flashback that as a girl she had aroused desires in Jacky and in Diederik, his friend and accomplice in pubertal curiosity. Diederik, it later turns out, is gay, but Jacky's heterosexual burgeoning is cut cruelly short, or rather mashed up, in that he is castrated by Lucia's brother Bruno holding him down and pounding his testicles with rocks, simply for fancying his sister and for catching Bruno and his friends masturbating over porn mags. Bruno quips that he intends to dish out some "balls-ache"; such sickening punning reappears in other scenes where the film pushes the boat out to play on the wilder shores of transgressive humour, a further example of the conservative aesthetics of the film's relatively straight form of storytelling being no bar to philosophical extremism. Perhaps this is why director Roskam, a painter in his earlier career, cites the influence of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud. Upsetting as these painters might be, they are conservative rather than revolutionary or avant-garde.

From Freud, Roskam has taken a colour palette which, whatever its intensity, can feel self-consciously gloomy at times, dreary and restricted. From Bacon come the most striking images of the film: the naked male figure in agony on the cruel levelling proscenium that is a toilet or bathroom floor strewn with needles and pills is something of a primal scene for Bacon, and in Jacky's case integral to his daily routine of Testoviron, Virosteron, Mestanolone and what his dealer describes as the "bazooka" that is Methyltestosterone. Alarming as this claustrophobic little theatre of the big fix is, its sordidness takes on a poignancy when we learn that, because of his terrible boyhood mutilation, testosterone drugs have been a necessary part of Jacky's medication from which it is but a small step into steroid abuse. Furthermore, the stage is set in another way because all the drugging is an extension of Jacky the farmer

*Something is rotten in the state of Belgium, the film seems to be hinting. Beyond its plot's drugs and crime lie social and political tensions*

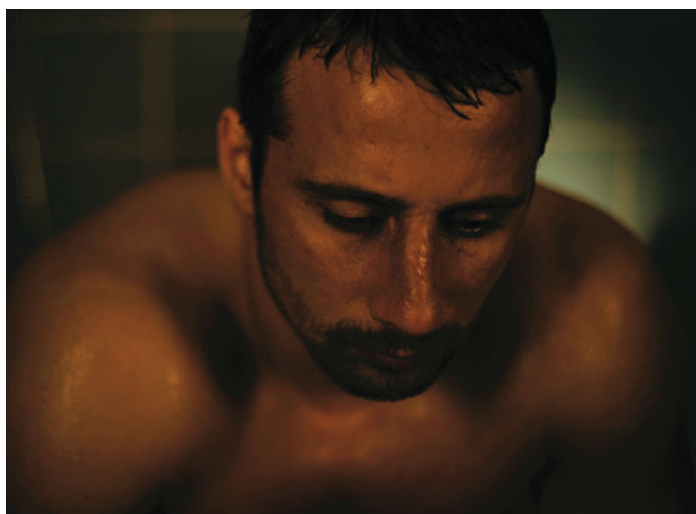
who, like his father before him, routinely injects his cattle with illegal hormones, forms of the drug Diethylstilbestrol (DES).

In fact, the plot of the film, inspired by the murder of a real-life vet in the late 1990s, revolves around "the hormone underworld mafia". It's a phrase used in a TV news report at the point in the film when we learn of the murder of a policeman. Those responsible are the West Flanders de Kuyper gang with whom Jacky's Uncle Eddy and their vet Sam are doing business. Jacky has always been a reluctant participant but now is left holding the fort, or rather the farm, as the police close in.

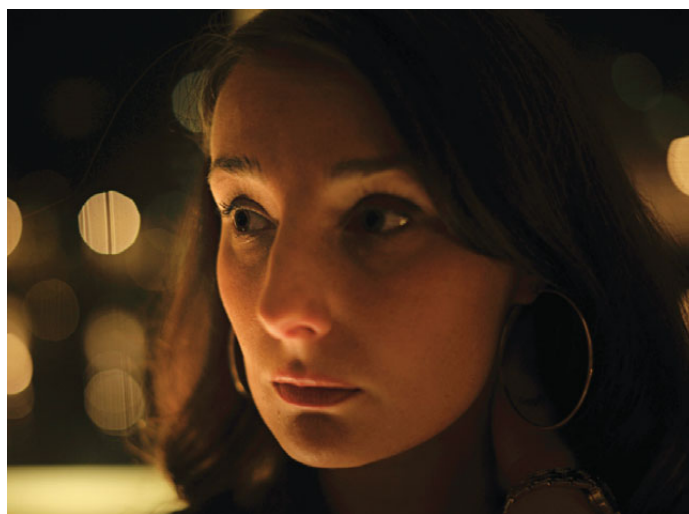
Compared to the bold way in which it accesses the traumatised consciousness of Jacky, the film's police-procedural and thriller elements are pretty unremarkable and at times downright creaky in their plotting. A crazed and drunken Jacky at one point beats a nightclubber into a vegetative state but two other characters appear in a similar condition without adequate explanation.

Touching up the one-dimensional police-procedural with a bit of neo-noir and the sense of unspeakable evil evoked at the beginning of the film gives *Bullhead* a scope whose ambitions are not always realised. But they are certainly there, even if sometimes it's only between the lines that you sense a bigger picture. For instance, the drugs theme makes you think of the Belgian involvement in the huge doping scandals in professional cycling. There's something rotten in the state of Belgium, the film seems to be hinting. Beyond the drugs and crime lie social and political tensions like those between the Flemish-speaking de Kuyper gang and the French-speaking Walloons who do the gang's dirty work when it comes to disposing of hot cars. The mechanics David and Christian, like some low comedy duo playing out the stereotype of the impoverished and stupid Walloon, mutter – probably with their Standard Liège bobble-hats on – about hoity-toity West Flanders and the de Kuyper henchman Leon. He sports a Club Brugge scarf, is a fascist, and his work as a mercenary has almost certainly taken him to Africa. Meanwhile a vet chortles over dinner about selling monkey meat to Africans, another of the film's uneasy references to the heart of darkness that colonial Belgians and their accompanying atrocities transplanted to the Congo.

It's a tribute to director of photography



Beauty and beast: Matthias Schoenaerts




The object of his affection: Jeanne Dandoy





**Bring up the bodies:** personal and social trauma lurks under the skin of steroid-fuelled Jacky (Matthias Schoenaerts)

Nicolas Karakatsanis that Jacky's walk near the beginning of the film functions as a harbinger of tensions to come as well as a setting off bigger-picture trains of thought. It also gets you asking a more functional question: did the director get a hyped-up bodybuilder to act or did they get an actor to 'build'? In fact, this truly great performance by actor Matthias Schoenaerts is the result of two punishing years of training and diet – and no steroids.

The gait brilliantly cultivated by the actor is why we can take so much from that first walk. Those "fucked" secrets are not just buried in Flanders's fields but within a living body. Jacky walks with head pushed forward in the gladiatorial aggression of 'those about to die will nut you first and salute you second'. But there is tenderness, a soulful beauty at the heart of his brutishness that makes the film, with its sentiment and savagery, a retelling in one body of the Beauty and the Beast myth. There is also something Christ-like about Jacky's 'sacred head ill-used', as we soon discover. Such a head can be read as bowed – even, for a latter-day minotaur-cum-bullman, cowed, to coin a phrase. And the film keeps on coining them, with its meditation on masculinity ("Do you have the balls?" is a frequent question) and with its many puns on manhood and 'meat'. 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Bart Van Langendonck  
**Screenplay**  
Michaël R. Roskam  
**Director of Photography**  
Nicolas Karakatsanis  
**Editor**  
Alain Dessauvage  
**Production Designer**  
Walter Brugmans  
**Music**  
Raf Keunen  
**Sound**  
Benoit de Clerck  
**Costumes**  
Margriet Proce

©Savage Film/

Eyeworks Film & TV Drama/Artemis Productions/  
Waterland Film  
**Production Companies**  
Savage Film & Eyeworks present in co-production with Artemis Productions & Waterland Film with the support of Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, Nederlands Fonds voor de Film, Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Communauté française de Belgique,

Télédiffuseurs Wallons, Belgische Taxshelter voor Filmfinanciering, MEDIA Development Programme of the EU and the participation of Régions wallonne et de Bruxelles Capitale a film by Michaël R. Roskam With the participation of Flanders Image, Kinopolis, KFD, VTM, Telenet en Prime, Justbridge

**Cast**  
**Matthias Schoenaerts**  
Jacky Vanmarsenille  
**Jean-Marie Lesuisse**  
Uncle Eddy Vanmarsenille  
**Jeroen Perceval**  
Diederik Maes  
**Jeanne Dandoy**  
Lucia Schepers  
**Barbara Sarafian**  
Eva Forrester  
**Sam Louwyck**  
Marc de Kuyper  
**Frank Lammers**  
Sam Raymond  
**Tibo Vandenborre**

Antony de Greef  
**David Murgia**  
young Bruno Schepers  
**Robin Valvekens**  
young Jacky Vanmarsenille  
**Baudouin Wolwertz**  
young Diederik Maes  
**Erico Salamone**  
Christian Budo  
**Philippe Grand'Henry**  
David Budo  
**Kris Cuppens**  
Jean Vanmarsenille  
**Sofie Sente**  
Irene Vanmarsenille  
Hein van der Heijden

Renaat Maes  
**Mike Reus**  
Charles Richter  
**Juda Joslinga**  
Bruno Schepers  
**Kristof Renson**  
Stieve Vanmarsenille

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1] Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

Belgian/Dutch theatrical title  
**Rundskop**

**Belgium, the present.** Jacky runs the Vanmarsenille family farm near Limburg. Like his father before him, he fattens the cattle on illegal hormones. Jacky tells his Uncle Eddy and their corrupt vet Sam Raymond that he is reluctant to join forces with a West Flanders gang run by de Kuyper and shadowy associate Richter. Jacky's fears are proved right when a policeman trailing the gang is killed by Richter. Even worse, by a quirk of fate, it turns out that the tyres on the murder vehicle have been sold on to Jacky's brother Stieve by two dodgy mechanics out to make a fast buck by recycling a car they were meant to destroy.

Jacky is warned by Diederik, a member of the de Kuyper gang who is also a police informer, that the

police are about to swoop. Diederik owes Jacky because when they were boys he was pressurised into not giving evidence against an older boy, Bruno Schepers, the son of a businessman with criminal and police connections. Diederik had witnessed Bruno pounding Jacky's testicles with rocks – to the point of castration – for daring to fancy Bruno's sister Lucia and for catching Bruno and his friends masturbating over porn magazines.

Rather than heed Diederik's warning, Jacky, pumped up with the steroids that he's been taking for years, seeks out Lucia in an attempt to deal with the nightmare of his past. But the police arrive and Jacky is shot resisting arrest like a caged beast.



The gang's all here: Lambert Wilson, Anne Consigny, Mathieu Amalric, Sabine Azéma, Pierre Arditi

## You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet

France/Germany 2012

Director: Alain Resnais

Certificate PG 114m 31s

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

It is difficult to watch *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* without thinking that it may be the final film directed by the 90-year-old Alain Resnais, one of the last star filmmakers of the New Wave generation still at work. Not that the film is a melancholy or morbid exercise. Quite the opposite: *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* suggests rather Resnais's undiminished energy and wit. Indeed, in a typical act of ironic self-reflexivity, his choice of material is an intricate reflection on storytelling, love and death, and while he is using this project to look back at his own career, there is no suggestion of self-indulgence or failure of imagination. In fact, the new film is a return to form after his two most recent movies, *Private Fears in Public Places* (2006) and *Wild Grass* (2009).

For *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet*, his 18th feature since *Hiroshima mon amour* in 1959 (in addition

to many shorts and documentaries), Resnais has merged two plays by Jean Anouilh, a 1941 version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth (*Eurydice*) and the 1969 *Cher Antoine ou l'Amour raté* ('Dear Antoine, or failed love'). In *Cher Antoine* a playwright arranges for a group of friends to gather after his death in an isolated spot, where they find themselves stuck for two days – a situation that happens to mirror the topic of his final play, in which his last lover took the lead role. Resnais's film uses *Cher Antoine* as a framing device: stage director Antoine (Denis Podalydès) posthumously arranges a reunion of his favourite actors in his Provençal home and makes them watch a recording of his latest version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, a play that they have all performed in the past at different times under his direction. Resnais economically signals the parallels between Antoine and himself at the beginning of the film by having a disembodied authorial voice call all the cast in turn by their 'real' names – "Allo, Michel Piccoli? Allo, Sabine Azéma?" and so on).

In a dizzying Chinese-boxes structure, in which signs of theatricality (such as intertitles signalling each act) are ostentatiously

displayed, Resnais organises increasingly complex interactions between his three sets of actors – the young ones performing the screened new version of the play, and Antoine's friends, who between them include two former casts of the same play. At first, the editing simply cuts between the actors on the screen-within-the-screen and those watching, emoting, lip-synching or repeating. However, as the film progresses, the older actors gradually become more involved in acting out the play anew, and Resnais uses bolder visual strategies, with split screens showing two, and at times four, different images. Sometimes these are of separate casts playing the same scene, and sometimes the same actor recurs, traversing the different time frames. The extraordinary decor of Antoine's home itself mixes different styles, at once mythical (echoing the Greek-mythology imagery of the opening credits), stylised and cosy – a perfect setting for the somewhat predictable twist at the end.

Resnais connoisseurs will recall similar tropes from his filmography: groups of people thrown together in a strange location (*Last Year in Marienbad*, *Life Is a Bed of Roses*); actors repeating variations on the same pieces of





*Reflecting on storytelling, love and death, Resnais looks back on his own career without self-indulgence*



Don't look back: Michel Piccoli

dialogue (*Smoking/No Smoking*) and switching between different levels of performance (*Providence*, *On connaît la chanson*); characters moving between life and death (*Love unto Death*); and of course the title of the new film alludes to the leitmotif in his first, *Hiroshima mon amour* ("You saw nothing in Hiroshima").

But whether they are familiar with the director's earlier films or newcomers to his work, viewers can simply enjoy the superb acting of a cast that includes the cream of contemporary French stage and film actors, among them Piccoli, Azéma, Lambert Wilson, Anny Duperey, Pierre Arditi and Mathieu Amalric. The editing of the fragments from different scenes cuts across generations of actors and performance styles, from veterans like Piccoli to the unknown young cast of the film-within-the-film. It enables us to appreciate the fine nuances between, for instance, Arditi's urbane Orpheus and Wilson's smoother yet more anxious version, or the different levels of intensity in Anne Consigny and Azéma's Eurydices. In the part of Monsieur Henri (the figure of Destiny), Mathieu Amalric delivers, in his customary way, a brilliant combination of the nice and the sinister that perhaps remains most strongly in the memory. That Resnais wants his film to be first of all a tribute to actors is confirmed by his superimposition of Charles Aznavour's bouncy, celebratory song 'Viens voir les comédiens' ('Come and see the players') on the end credits.

*You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* thus offers a potted history of performance and trends in theatrical *mise en scène*, contrasting the avant-garde staging of the new *Eurydice*, set in what looks like a disused factory, with the deep sofas and actorly camaraderie to be found among the cast sitting in Antoine's home. The latter site is evocative of the boulevard theatre that Resnais both adapted and celebrated in such films as *Mélo* (1986) and *Pas sur la bouche* (2003). At the same time, his engagement with the cerebral nature of Anouilh's Theatre of the Absurd takes us back to the New Wave era and his collaborations with Nouveau Roman writers such as Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

That said, the choice of Anouilh is more surprising and perhaps the most problematic aspect of the film. Lines such as "This farce, this absurd melodrama, that's life" seem rather facile today, and Anouilh's interpretation of Eurydice as flighty and unknowable

borders on misogyny. This is echoed, though more subtly, in the film's coda, in which the young actress who plays Eurydice is seen mysteriously hovering in the cemetery.

When Resnais was adapting Duras or Robbe-Grillet in the late 1950s and early 1960s, his style was in perfect synch with these writers' modernity. When he was reworking an operetta like *Pas sur la bouche* or working with popular songs in *On connaît la chanson*, he was bridging the high culture/popular entertainment divide. With Anouilh, the gap is more awkward, a less agreeable fit, confirmed by the film's reception in France – also indicative of Anouilh's fall from critical grace. While Resnais's talent is celebrated across the board, critics have directed severe judgements towards the plays-within-the-film. And one has to agree that in his ability to extract a visually intriguing and emotionally rich drama out of this slightly passé theatrical material, Resnais undoubtedly demonstrates his continuing power as a great cinematic auteur. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jean-Louis Livi  
**Screenplay**  
Laurent Herbiet  
Alex Réval  
Based on the plays  
*Eurydice* and *Cher Antoine ou l'Amour*  
récité by Jean Anouilh

#### Director of

**Photography**  
Éric Gautier

#### Editor

Hervé de Luze

#### Art Director

Jacques Saulnier

#### Music

Mark Snow

#### Sound

Jean-Pierre Duret

Gérard Hardy

Gérard Lamps

#### Costumes

Jackie Budin-

Whitfield

Sophie Breton

Marie Cesari

**'Eurydice' Filmed by**  
Bruno Podalydès

©F Comme Film,  
StudioCanal, France  
2 Cinéma, Alamo  
Film Distribution,  
Christmas in July  
**Production**

#### Companies

Jean-Louis Livi  
presents an F  
Comme Film,  
StudioCanal, France  
2 Cinéma, Alamo  
Film Distribution,  
Christmas in July  
co-production  
With the  
participation of  
Canal+, Ciné+,  
France Télévisions  
With the support of  
Centre National du  
Cinéma et de l'Image  
Animée, Ministère  
de la Culture et de  
la Communication,  
ilmförderungsanstalt  
(FFA), Région  
Île-de-France  
In association  
with Cinéimage  
5, Soficinéma 8  
**Executive Producer**  
Julie Salvador

#### Cast

**Denis Podalydès**  
Antoine d'Anthac  
**Andrzej Seweryn**  
Marcellin  
**Mathieu Amalric**  
Pierre Arditi

**Sabine Azéma**  
Jean-Noël Brouté  
**Anne Consigny**  
**Anny Duperey**  
**Hippolyte Girardot**  
**Gérard Lartigau**  
**Michel Piccoli**  
**Michel Robin**  
**Jean-Christophe**  
**Sibertin-Blanc**  
**Michel Vuillermoz**  
Lambert Wilson  
themselves

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

**10,306 ft +8 frames**

French theatrical title  
**Vous n'avez  
encore rien vu**

**France, the present. On the death of playwright Antoine d'Anthac, a group of actors who have worked with him receive a phone call asking them to gather in his former home in Provence. There, they watch a video recording of Antoine's modern-day version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth performed by a young theatre company. Since the actors have themselves all acted in different versions of the play under Antoine's direction, they begin to repeat the lines as they watch. We switch between different groups of actors – in the film of the play, and among the actors watching it – saying the same lines, echoing each other. As they do so, they loosely follow the mythical story: Orpheus and Eurydice fall in love, Eurydice dies and Orpheus is given the chance to retrieve her from the Underworld. However, driven by jealousy about her former love life, he disobeys the order not to look at her face and she dies again; he plans to be reunited with her in death.**

**As the video recording ends, Antoine appears, revealing that this has all been a game to test the strength of his friends' love for him. He then kills himself and we see the actors in the cemetery, followed by the young actress who played Eurydice in the recording, suggesting that she was his last mistress.**





In the dark: the attack on bin Laden's compound

## Zero Dark Thirty

USA 2012

Director: Kathryn Bigelow

Certificate 15 156m 59s

See Feature  
on page 30

### Reviewed by Guy Westwell

As you'd expect from the creative team involved, *Zero Dark Thirty* is technically awe-inspiring, and might reasonably expect any number of Academy Award nominations. Mark Boal (*In the Valley of Elah*, *The Hurt Locker*) has written a tight, detailed and fast-paced script – a real achievement considering the complexity of the events depicted. Handheld camerawork by Greig Fraser (*Let Me In*, *Killing Them Softly*) is crisp, jittery and unsettling but never veers into being a distracting conceit. The editing of William Goldenberg (*Heat*, *Argo*) and Dylan Tichenor (*There Will Be Blood*, *Lawless*) intricately knits together the film's complex array of claustrophobic torture chambers, well-upholstered CIA briefing rooms, embattled US military bases and bustling Pakistani cities (filmed in India). Sound designer Paul N.J. Ottosson (*The Hurt*

*Locker*) creates a mood of purpose and paranoia, and composer Alexandre Desplat (*Argo*, *Rust and Bone*) lends a Bernard Herrmann-esque gravitas to the film's final scenes: intimating some deep, credible meaning to the killing of Osama bin Laden. Kathryn Bigelow's direction is nothing less than commanding.

Reviews have been largely favourable but this is a film about which we should be deeply suspicious. *Zero Dark Thirty* begins with the words "Based on first person accounts of actual events", thereby making a qualified claim to be a 'true story'. However, the film's neat, chapter-like structure and the way in which the

dogged, difficult work of the CIA investigation is set against a backdrop of repeated terrorist attacks (Khobar Towers, the Islamabad Marriott, 7/7 and so on) lends a purifying coherence to the chaos and contingency of the recent past. A disturbing opening sequence features a telephone call made on 9/11 that appears to record a woman burning to death in the World Trade Center. The next shot is a scene of torture. This transition (two years in real time, two seconds in screen time) establishes a direct correlation between terrorist atrocity and the unbridled CIA response, lending urgency to the investigation and legitimacy to torture. As British viewers will no doubt be aware, any claim that the 7/7 bombings were part of some kind of grand scheme orchestrated by Osama bin Laden, as the logic of the film's structure implies, is extremely questionable. The gloss of verisimilitude cannot disguise *Zero Dark Thirty*'s central thrust: the war on terror is justified revenge for 9/11 and was (and should be) waged by any means necessary.

Beatings, waterboarding, sexual humiliation and the use of stress positions are all shown in unflinching detail. But torture is here conducted with professionalism and intellectual purpose by highly qualified CIA operatives. The film



Kill Bin: Jessica Chastain





The hunt locker: Mark Duplass

even takes the trouble to tell us that one of them holds a PhD. This is a purposeful revision of the sadistic, criminal and counterproductive actions described in *Standard Operating Procedure*, *Taxi to the Dark Side* and *Rendition*, among other films. Late in *Zero Dark Thirty* a CIA investigator states that he is only 60 per cent certain that the intelligence on Osama bin Laden's whereabouts is accurate because it has been obtained, in part, as a result of torture. The film's central character, CIA investigator Maya, states that she is 100 per cent certain (sardonically downgrading her estimate to 95 per cent to reassure those around her who can't handle such certainty). Closely aligned with Maya, and with the benefit of hindsight, the viewer knows that the intelligence is accurate:

*The gloss of verisimilitude cannot disguise the central thrust: the war on terror is justified revenge for 9/11 and should be waged by any means*

of course Osama's there, torture works.

In the hands of another actor – say, Tom Cruise – this kind of unwavering self-belief would ring false. However, the casting of Jessica Chastain (pre-Raphaelite looks, bone-china complexion and watery gaze) and her intelligent, understated performance (in which these physical attributes are shown to belie a ferocious strength and sense of purpose) create a more complex image: her self-belief is fragile and hard won but it is unwavering nevertheless. In a key scene, the Navy SEALs tasked with killing bin Laden are at first cynical about their mission but Maya's talismanic presence provides a palliative for their experience of failed wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The film even hints at some kind of providence at work; after a suicide bombing in which a fellow investigator and friend is killed, Maya states that, "I believe I was spared so I could finish the job. I'm going to smoke everybody involved. And then I'm going to kill bin Laden." These are the scenes that make the film tick, with Maya's fragile, glowering certainty renewing faith both in the CIA and in America's resolve to wage war.

The raid on Osama bin Laden's compound, which ends the film, eschews first-person shooter suspense, gung-ho dialogue and action-movie heroics for a more prosaic account that is detailed and suspenseful. The raid culminates in the killing of bin Laden in a shadowy room. Maya monitors the raid remotely (substituting for Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton watching anxiously from the White House) and afterwards boards a cargo plane. She is asked: "Where do you want to go?" The question remains unanswered and the final shot has her in tears. Here a robust rightwing position (the CIA is capable and just, it is willing to undertake dirty work but only in extremis, and, crucially, it delivers) is ameliorated by Maya's suffering (she has no friends, no relationships, this work is costly, her heart bleeds). As such, the film not only renews faith in an institution that has been subject to considerable, and legitimate, criticism in the preceding decade (*Syriana*, *Fair Game*, *Bourne*), but also seeks to elicit sympathy for the traumatic experience suffered by those working within it (a similar move is at play in the Showtime television series *Homeland*). Maya's character, and her exquisitely beautiful suffering, forms a *pietà* for the war on terror, a lamentation that surfaces over the contradiction of a liberal president elected with a strong anti-war pledge continuing to order illegal drone strikes in Pakistan and beyond. ☹

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Mark Boal  
Kathryn Bigelow  
Megan Ellison

### Written by

Mark Boal

### Director of

Photography

Greig Fraser

### Edited by

Dylan Tichenor

William Goldenberg

### Production Designer

Jeremy Hindle

### Music Composed and Conducted by

Alexandre Desplat

### Sound Design

Paul N.J. Ottosson

### Costumes

Designed by

George L. Little

### Stunt Co-ordinator

Stuart Thorp

©Zero Dark Thirty, LLC

### Production Companies

An Annapurna

production

A First Light

production

A Mark Boal

production

### Executive Producers

Greg Shapiro

Colin Wilson

Ted Schipper

### Cast

Jessica Chastain

Maya

Jason Clarke

Dan

Joel Edgerton

Patrick, Squadron

Team Leader

Jennifer Ehle

Jessica

Mark Strong

George

Kyle Chandler

Joseph Bradley

Edgar Ramirez

Larry from

Ground Branch

James Gandolfini

C.I.A. Director

Chris Pratt

Justin, DevGru

Callan Mulvey

Saber, DevGru

Mark Duplass

Steve

### Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

[1.85:1]

### Distributor

Universal Pictures

International UK & Eire

The film begins with audio recorded during the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, including a telephone call made by a woman trapped in one of the Twin Towers. Two years later, CIA investigators Dan and Maya use torture to interrogate a terrorist at a 'black site' in an undisclosed location, seeking information about the whereabouts of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Maya is posted to the US embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, and continues her investigation. There are news reports of a terrorist attack on the Khobar Towers residential complex in Saudi Arabia. In 2004 the investigation shifts its focus to a terrorist named Abu Ahmed. Maya travels to a black site in Gdansk, Poland, and to Bagram airbase in Afghanistan where she oversees further interrogations. She watches helplessly as the 7/7 attacks in London are reported on the news. In 2008, back in Islamabad, Maya and fellow

CIA investigator Jessica are caught up in a bomb attack at the Marriott hotel. In 2009, Jessica makes contact with a source who has infiltrated a terrorist cell in the tribal territories in Northern Pakistan. During a meeting at Camp Chapman in Afghanistan the source detonates a bomb, killing Jessica and six other CIA operatives. In response, Maya redoubles her efforts, discovering that earlier reports of Abu Ahmed's death are inaccurate and arranging for a Kuwaiti contact to be bribed to reveal his whereabouts. A covert surveillance operation in Rawalpindi and Peshawar leads her to Osama bin Laden's hiding place in Abbottabad. Frustrated, Maya watches as a risk-averse CIA and White House are slow to react. A plan is eventually agreed and Maya travels to Area 51 in Southern Nevada to brief the Navy SEAL team who will conduct the raid. In May 2011, the Abbottabad compound is attacked and Osama bin Laden is killed.

## American Mary

Canada 2012  
Directors: Jen Soska, Sylvia Soska  
Certificate 18 102m 43s

### Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Mary Mason, antiheroine of Jen and Sylvia Soska's second feature, belongs to a lineage of horror surgeons that includes the protagonists of Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960) and Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* (2011), with the twist that most of the people whose faces and bodies Mary mangles are willing, paying customers. Whereas Pierre Brasseur's Dr Génessier and Antonio Banderas's Dr Ledgard, both of them men at the top of their profession, used their skills to restore or reincarnate loved ones after disfiguring car accidents, exploited surgical trainee Mary (Katharine Isabelle) is often called on by people who positively want to resemble crash victims. Nominally a horror movie, *American Mary* is for long passages a satirical but affectionate look at the weird but apparently real world of 'extreme body modification' (EBM). The movie's central horror and its perpetrators are, by pointed contrast, entirely of the ordinary.

Early in the film, shaken up after operating on an injured mobster for a stack of notes that will see her through medical school, Mary picks up her phone to hear a strange, high-pitched voice with unmistakable overtones of impending danger. When the voice returns on her intercom, asking whether its owner can leave a package, the generic die seems cast. When Mary turns her back to the door and a red shape passes behind her, bloody violence is surely about to ensue. The shape, once seen clearly, is not exactly reassuring: a woman who has made herself "kind of resemble", as she puts it, Betty Boop (hence the voice). But Beatress (Tristan Risk), though she leads Mary into her life of medical malpractice, proves to be her one real friend – and all but one of Mary's crimes, if such they are, are at least consensual. As Jean Renoir almost put it, everyone has their reasons for mutilating themselves.



Model surgeon: Katharine Isabelle

Beatress went under the knife because she wanted to look the way she says she feels. Mary's first commission, Ruby (Paula Lindberg), a fashion designer, is a rebel against God: it's not for Him to say how she ought to look, and she wants to look like Barbie – no nipples, sewn-up labia and "the extra bits" removed. Having made a name for herself in the EBM community, 'Bloody Mary' is approached by the 'demon twins of Berlin', played by the film's writers Jen and Sylvia Soska, who want to swap arms so that they can feel truly connected. Mary does it for the money and because she's good at it; her medical instructors, however, enjoy cutting into people, to whose needs they are indifferent, describing themselves as "slashers"; and this attitude seems to help explain why one of them rapes her with the other's collusion.

The nature of Mary's revenge is predictable – multiple amputation and then some – but once accomplished, neither she nor the Soskas know where to go next. Laden with ideas, *American Mary*'s narrative skeleton is finally broken by its mounting burden of pleasingly reversed expectations and rich ironies; but these are considerable, and Katharine Isabelle is superb in a role that ranges from kook to killer. **S**

## Ballroom Dancer

Denmark 2012  
Directors: Andreas Koefoed, Christian H. Bonke

### Reviewed by Sue Harris

The huge success of pro-celebrity dance shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing* in the UK and *Dancing with the Stars* in the US has popularised a conception of ballroom dancing as a sequined world of frivolity and fun, heavy on the spray tan and light on actual dance content. Like all talent shows of the age, the dance apprenticeship is little more than a pretext for a 'journey', the protagonist's transformation from clunky novice to show-pony played out in full view of a primetime television audience.

This fly-on-the-wall documentary about the world of professional Latin dance is an altogether grimmer affair, taking us on the journey of Ukrainian-born former Russian champion Slavik Kryklyvyy as he launches a comeback with new young protégée Anna Melnikova. The original aim of the film seems to have been to provide a record of the success and amorous complicity of this shiny pair, a feelgood story of triumph over adversity and a return to glory thanks to hard work, loving support and single-minded dedication to the task. But when the promised success fails to materialise, the film takes an altogether darker turn, revealing the intolerable pressures and high personal costs of being less than perfect in this strange, brutal, insular world.

Slavik in training is a very different creature from Slavik the public performer: a brooding perfectionist whose life is lived in a series of rehearsal studios and gyms, anonymous hotels and identikit dance halls. He spends hours in the gym, mechanically honing his body like a fine tool, and is an impatient and cruel master to Anna, who struggles with his choreography and his volatility in equal measure. Driven to excel in a sport that is about the perfect partnership, Slavik is the ultimate lone athlete, blaming and sulking when he feels himself held back by a lesser talent: "You have killed my mood, my wishes, my desire and my focus," he says to Anna after their fifth placement at the UK Open Championships in Blackpool, wallowing in narcissism and oblivious to the effects of such intolerance on a talented but less experienced young dancer. It seems perverse that this joyless existence should be in the service of such brief moments of elation on the dance floor, but that is precisely why the film is so compelling, drawing back an Oz-like curtain to reveal an unpleasant underside to both the performers and the passions that motivate them. In a world so awash with hurt, betrayal, reproach and denigration, creating the perfect Paso Doble or Cha-Cha suddenly seems ridiculous rather than magical.

Nevertheless, this is a film about the beauty of the dance, and some exquisite professional performances punctuate the story of Slavik and Anna's disintegrating relationship. The final sequence of the film in particular is breathtaking, as the estranged pair rehearse silently, letting the dance speak for all the emotions – love, regret, anger – that are clearly still very much in play. A Rumba rehearsal is a slow, sensuous conversation between the two, showing them in a state of greater intimacy and physical communication than at any previous point in the film. It plays out like the reconciliation we crave, and seems to announce all the professional maturity necessary

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Evan Tylor  
John Curtis

#### Written by

Jen Soska  
Sylvia Soska

#### Director of Photography

Brian Pearson

#### Editor

Bruce Mackinnon

#### Production Designer

Tony Devenyi

#### Composer

Peter Allen

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Scott Aiken

#### Costume Designer

Jayne Mabbott

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

Rob Hayter

In association with

430 Productions

and Twisted Twins

Productions

With the assistance

of the Canadian Film

or Video Production

Tax Credit

With the participation

of the Province of

British Columbia

Film Incentive BC

#### Executive Producers

Angela Towle

Riaz Tyab

Kathryn Griffiths

Tom Raycove

#### Cast

Katharine Isabelle

Mary Mason

Antonio Cupo

Billy Barker

Tristan Risk

Beatress Johnson

David Lovgren

Dr Grant

Paula Lindberg

Ruby Realgirl

Clay St Thomas

Dr Walsh

John Emmett Tracey

Detective Dolor

#### Twan Holliday

Lance Delgreggio

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

FrightFest

9,244 ft +8 frames

Aberdeen, US, the present. Mary, an impoverished but highly promising trainee surgeon, seeks work as a 'masseuse' at a local strip club. Her audition with manager Billy is interrupted when a badly injured mobster is brought in. Billy offers Mary \$5,000 to patch up the mobster and she accepts. Soon afterwards, Beatress, a stripper at the club who has had plastic surgery to make herself resemble Betty Boop, approaches Mary with a request to perform an 'extreme body modification' operation on a friend, Ruby, for \$12,000. Mary accepts, as a one-off.

Beatress tells Mary that her skills are in demand in the EBM (extreme body modification) community. Though Mary initially wants no part in it, out of curiosity she looks at an EBM website. Meanwhile she begins the last stages of her training and is invited to a party by one of the hospital residents, Dr Walsh. With Walsh's collusion, another doctor, Dr Grant, spikes Mary's drink and rapes her. The next day, Mary pays Billy \$5,000 to abduct Grant, on whom she conducts a prolonged and gruesome EBM experiment. Having quit medical school, Mary becomes a professional body modifier. She keeps Grant alive, continuing to torture him periodically and eventually killing him. She has Billy kill Walsh to stop him talking to the police, though this does little to quell their interest in her. Before the police find her out, however, Ruby's enraged beau, having tortured Beatress for Mary's address, finds her and kills her.



## Bullet to the Head

USA 2012  
Director: Walter Hill  
Certificate 15 91m 26s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

After an absence of ten years, *Bullet to the Head* sees Walter Hill limbering up on cosily familiar turf. Quite literally, in fact: one bloody showdown recycles the same atmospheric location – an imposing New Orleans steelworks – that featured in his 1975 debut *Hard Times*. As thick blues riffs reverberate over moody aerial shots of a nocturnal Big Easy, the sense of déjà vu intensifies – all this before the introduction of hitman Sylvester Stallone and cop Sung Kang as the latest mismatched, racially diverse buddy pairing, an action formula Hill more or less bottled in 1982 with *48 Hrs*. Only the undercranked flash cuts that seem a ubiquitous fixture of contemporary action fare argue against *Bullet to the Head* being salvaged from a time-capsule buried circa 1986. Defiantly straightforward and brazenly derivative, it's a minor workout for the re-emergent director. Rustiness isn't an issue, however – the terse hyper-violence, profane trash-talk and lean frame suggest that Hill never really left.

Based on a French graphic novel, *Bullet to the Head* doffs its hat to Frank Miller's *Sin City* in its sketching of an infernally corrupt metropolis, one where the notion of law and order is essentially redundant. It also serves to remind us that Hill – despite once claiming that “every film I've made has been a western, which is ultimately a stripped-down moral universe” – is as much a purveyor of black-eyed, bloody-nosed noir: think of the fatalism imbuing gangland odyssey *The Warriors* (1979), rock-'n'-roll melodrama *Streets of Fire* (1984) and military-manoeuvres nightmare *Southern Comfort* (1981).

The slender plot of *Bullet to the Head* turns on a neat conceit: gruff assassin Jimmy Bobo (Stallone)

grudgingly teams up with straight-laced Washington DC cop Taylor Kwon (Kang) to avenge the murders of their respective partners. Complicating the issue is the small matter of Jimmy having carried out the hit on the policeman, but both men soon find themselves targets of the same nefarious conspiracy. It's old terrain for Hill, reconfiguring the cop/criminal anti-bonding of *48 Hrs*. with an added twist.

Part of what's endearing – and entertaining – about *Bullet to the Head* is that it seems vaguely aware of its throwback nature but is careful not to let on too much. Stallone, for his part – after orchestrating nostalgia trips either solemnly earnest (*Rambo*) or knowingly tongue-in-cheek (*The Expendables*) is given his best role in years as the monumentally grumpy Bobo, a terminally unimpressed bayou golem who insists on bringing his own bottle of bourbon into bars and delivers a Luddite's rubbishing of Taylor's reliance on smartphone technology for sleuthing. Kang proves a somewhat insipid foil, but there's amusing support from Christian Slater and Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje as a

grotesque pair of slimy villains. Amid the perforated bodies and tart one-liners, Alessandro Camon's script manages a few sardonic surprises. The bad guys here are crooked gentrifiers, riling Stallone's old-school dinosaur even more, while a ludicrous axe fight is delayed by a hulking henchman's lengthy complaint about said aggressive redevelopment. This gives an otherwise throwaway film an elegiac tinge that's entirely in tune with the past work of a director once dubbed the heir to Peckinpah. **S**



### Bayou golem: Sylvester Stallone

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Alexandra Milichan  
Alfred Gough  
Miles Millar  
Kevin King-  
Templeton  
**Screenplay**  
Alessandro Camon  
Based on the graphic  
novel *Du Plomb dans  
la tête* written by  
Matz and illustrated  
by Colin Wilson  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Lloyd Ahern  
**Edited by**  
Tim Alverson  
**Production Designer**  
Toby Corbett  
**Music**  
Steve Mazzaro  
**Sound Mixer**  
Lee Orloff  
**Costume Designer**  
Ha Nguyen  
**Visual Effects**  
Travis Baumann  
Christopher Custodio  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
JJ Perry

@Headshot Film  
Investments, LLC

**Production  
Companies**  
Warner Bros.  
Pictures presents in  
association with Dark  
Castle and IM Global  
a Millar Gough Ink/  
EMJAG production  
An After Dark  
Films production  
A Walter Hill film  
**Executive Producers**  
Stuart Ford  
Brian Kavanaugh-  
Jones  
Deepak Nayar  
Steve Squillante  
Joel Silver  
Courtney Solomon  
Allan Zeman  
Steve Richards  
Stuart Besser

**Cast**  
Sylvester Stallone  
James Bonomo,  
'Jimmy Bobo'  
Sung Kang  
Taylor Kwon  
Sarah Shahi  
Lisa Bonomo  
Adewale  
Akinnuoye-Agbaje

Robert Nkomo Morel  
**Christian Slater**  
Marcus Baptiste  
Jason Momoa  
Keegan  
Jon Seda  
Louis Blanchard  
**Holt McCallany**  
Hank Greely  
Brian Van Holt  
Ronnie Earl  
Weronika Rosati  
Lola  
Dane Rhodes  
Lt Lebreton  
Marcus Lyle Brown  
Detective Towne

Dolby Digital/SDDS  
In Colour  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
E1 Films  
8,229 ft +0 frames

New Orleans, the present. Hitman Jimmy Bobo and his partner Louis are hired by an anonymous client to kill a Washington DC detective, Hank Greely. Following the hit, Louis is murdered by Keegan, an assassin employed by crooked property tycoons Baptiste and Morel, who have been bribing politicians in order to pursue ruthless city redevelopment. Greely's former partner Taylor Kwon believes that Greely was close to exposing the transactions. Rebuffing Taylor's proposal that they work together to avenge Louis and Hank, Jimmy later saves him from being killed by bent cops. Discovering that Baptiste ordered the hit, Jimmy and Taylor infiltrate a masked ball at his mansion. Jimmy abducts Baptiste, holding him hostage at his bayou shack. Baptiste gives up a flash drive containing evidence of his and Morel's corrupt dealings, but Jimmy – to Taylor's fury – kills him anyway. Keegan and his men lay siege to the shack, but Jimmy and Taylor escape. Taylor takes the evidence to a superior, who tries to kill him, but Jimmy despatches him first. Morel has Keegan kidnap Jimmy's daughter, demanding the flash drive as ransom. At the handover, Morel accepts Jimmy's bluffed offer to assassinate Taylor. Angry at being discarded, Keegan kills Morel. Jimmy fights Keegan, who is finally shot dead by Taylor. Jimmy shoots Taylor, insisting that the police should think he is responsible for the carnage, but Taylor ultimately keeps silent. Six weeks later, Taylor meets Jimmy for a drink, and warns him to stay out of trouble.



### Last tango: Slavik Kryklyvyy, Anne Melnikova

for the partnership's future triumph; but once over, it leaves Slavik desolate, crouched on the sprung floor in despair at his all too evident loss. Appropriately, and inevitably, their final public performance is the Paso Doble, the most tightly choreographed and ritualised of the Latin dances, an aggressive and dramatic battle of wills between the male matador and the female bull. Slavik's thrilling triumph at the moment of the kill is of course a wholly Pyrrhic victory. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Jakob Nordenhof  
Jonck  
**Cinematography**  
Andreas Koefoed  
Christian H. Bonke  
**Film Editors**  
Asa Mossberg  
Marion Tudor  
**Music**  
Magnus Jarlbo  
**Sound Design**  
Morten Groth

@Danish  
Documentary  
Production

**Companies**  
Danish Documentary  
presents  
Produced by Danish  
Documentary  
Productions  
Produced with the  
support of New  
Danish Screen,  
Nordisk Film  
og TV Fond  
**Executive  
Producers**  
Eva Mulvad  
Sigrid Dyekjaer  
Phie Ambo  
Mikala Krogh

Pernille Rose  
Grønkrjaer

**In Colour  
Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof


A documentary following the Russian former World Amateur Latin Champion Slavik Kryklyvyy as he relaunches his dance career with new partner Anna Melnikova. The personal and professional lives of the pair are inseparably entwined as they work daily with a variety of coaches and trainers and travel to take part in competitions around the world. But their personal relationship comes under increasing strain as Anna struggles to live up to Slavik's exacting standards and bears the brunt of his dissatisfaction with their results. Their relationship breaks down completely after they are placed fifth at the UK Open Championships in Blackpool in 2010, a disappointment compounded by the triumph of Slavik's former partner Joanna Leunis and her new partner Michael Malitowski. Slavik and Anna try but fail to maintain a purely professional relationship, and he is overwhelmed by a combination of depression and heartbreak. The film ends with Anna's marriage to another dance professional, Justinas Duknauskas, and Slavik's return to the studio as a dance teacher.

## Code Name: Geronimo

USA 2012  
Director: John Stockwell  
Certificate 15 100m 45s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Made for television, and clearly influenced more by the hectic style of Showtime's *Homeland* than by any cinematic predecessor, this fictionalised account of the elimination of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 dispenses with documented historiography in favour of an irreverent and indeed oddly playful approach.

Kendall Lampkin's script is relentlessly and bafflingly sex-obsessed. Sharing a predisposition to cuckoldry, the Navy SEALs assigned to the mission are primarily driven by sexual competition, while in the corridors of US military power, Kathleen Robertson's icy security adviser is persistently sidelined by her male colleagues, and responds with cracks like "Cock backwards is still cock"; female al-Qaeda operatives are used for diversion and bin Laden is rumoured to be hiding behind his wives. Indeed, the phrase "women and children" recurs, in reference both to the collateral-damage hazards inherent in a raid, and to what's being risked by the US SEALs. The phrase is lent an odd irony by the film's general near-violent suspicion of women and their wives. *Code Name: Geronimo* further sacrifices its unsentimental cool over a laboured, mawkish sequence of the SEALs saying farewell to their families over videophone prior to the mission; and any claim to critical distance or straightforwardly fictional retelling is compromised when it uses real footage of President Obama at its close. 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Nicolas Chartier  
Zev Foreman  
Tony Mark  
**Written by**  
Kendall Lampkin  
**Director of Photography**  
Peter A. Holland  
**Edited by**  
Ben Callahan  
**Production Designer**  
Guy Barnes  
**Music**  
Paul Haslinger  
**Sound Mixer**  
Bayard Carey  
**Costume Designer**  
Miye Matsumoto  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Jimmy Romano

©Geronimo  
Nevada, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Voltage Pictures  
presents in  
association with  
Picture Perfect

Corporation and  
Durban Inc. a  
Voltage Pictures  
production  
A John Stockwell film  
**Executive Producer**  
Phillip B. Goldfine

**Cast**  
**Cam Gigandet**  
Stunner  
**Anson Mount**  
Cherry  
**Freddy Rodriguez**  
Trench  
**Alvin 'Xzibit' Joiner**  
Mule  
**Kathleen Robertson**  
Vivian  
**Eddie Kaye Thomas**  
Christian  
**Kenneth Miller**  
Sauce  
**Robert Knepper**  
lieutenant  
commander  
**William Fichtner**  
Mr Guidry  
**Jenny Gabrielle**

Tricia

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

9,067 ft +8 frames

US television title  
**Seal Team Six: The  
Raid on Osama  
Bin Laden**

Poland, 2011. Under threat of torture, a badly beaten suspect in a detention centre provides a name. Cut to Pakistan: undercover US agents pursue leads to a high-level suspect. In Virginia, military personnel squabble about the reliability of intelligence, and the wisdom of attempting a raid to capture or kill this suspect. A group of Navy SEALs is assembled, its members correctly speculating that their target is Osama bin Laden. After a drive to collect DNA samples from the bin Laden family via a fake inoculation drive, the SEALs storm the compound and bin Laden is killed. Real news footage shows President Obama announcing the death.

## Django Unchained

USA 2012  
Director: Quentin Tarantino



None but the slave: Jamie Foxx, Franco Nero

See Feature  
on page 34

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In Quentin Tarantino's 2009 *Inglourious Basterds* there is a scene in which Nazi soldiers play a kind of 20-questions guessing game, trying to identify famous figures. One has been dealt King Kong: "I visited America?" "Yes." "When I arrived in America, was I displayed in chains?" "Yes." "Am I the story of the negro in America?" It was a disquieting little sneak-attack undercutting the righteousness of the American cause in a movie set behind enemy lines, and it pointed towards Tarantino's latest, *Django Unchained* – which is largely free of such surprises. Just as *Inglourious Basterds* corrected history with a Hitler-slaying fantasy of 'Jewish vengeance', so *Django Unchained* sets out to create a no-forgiveness fantasy of bloody black empowerment.

The title comes from *Django*, a 1966 spaghetti western starring Franco Nero, who makes a wholly egregious cameo here. With *Django Unchained* – which joins a lineage of countless name-alone 'sequels' – genre miscegenist Tarantino has hybridised spaghetti, where the only way to save civilisation is often to destroy it, with blaxploitation's barrel-of-a-gun enfranchisement. His *Django* harkens back to the post-*Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*

moment in American movies – a historically necessary moment – when all manner of pictures suddenly embodied the free-floating racial animus which had mostly been staved off with Stanley Kramer diplomacy when it appeared on screen before. It was a time when you might gape incredulously at James Mason using a black boy as a rheumatism-relieving footstool in 1975's *Mandingo*; when there were films released with titles like *The Legend of Nigger Charley* and *Run Nigger Run*; when shockumentarians Franco Prosperi and Gualtiero Jacopetti toured a recreated antebellum South in 1971's *Goodbye Uncle Tom*.

After enumerating the abuses of white masters, Prosperi and Jacopetti ended their film with a cathartic bang of reprisal: Afro'd young men in Black Panthers leather lead an invasion into a sleeping white family's bedroom where they slaughter the helpless occupants, dashing an infant's head against the wall. Tarantino's final purgative bloodbath – human bodies bursting like jam-filled confectioneries – does not go quite this far, though it does have Django using a shotgun to casually blow an unarmed woman through a doorway for comic effect, as if she's being yanked offstage by a vaudeville hook.

The viewer has a long road ahead before arriving at this dubious reward. *Django Unchained*

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Stacey Sher  
Reginald Hudlin  
Pilar Savone  
**Written by**  
Quentin Tarantino  
**Director of Photography**  
Robert Richardson  
**Film Editor**  
Fred Raskin  
**Production Designer**  
J. Michael Riva

**Django Theme by**  
Luis Enriquez Bacalov  
**Supervising Sound Editor**  
Name Name  
**Costume Designer**  
Sharen Davis  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Jeff Dashnaw

©Visiona  
Romantica, Inc.  
**Production**

**Companies**  
The Weinstein Company and Columbia Pictures present a film by Quentin Tarantino  
**Executive Producers**  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein  
Shannon McIntosh  
Michael Shamberg  
James W. Skotchdopole

**Cast**  
**Jamie Foxx**  
Django  
**Christoph Waltz**  
Dr King Schultz  
**Leonardo DiCaprio**  
Calvin J. Candie  
**Kerry Washington**  
Broomhilda von Shaft, 'Hildi'  
**Samuel L. Jackson**  
Stephen  
**Walton Goggins**

Billy Crash  
**Dennis Christopher**  
Leonide Moguy  
**James Remar**  
Butch Pooch/  
Ace Speck  
**David Steen**  
Mr Stonesipher  
**Dana Gourrier**  
Cora  
**Nichole Galicia**  
Sheba  
**Don Johnson**

Big Daddy

**Dolby Digital/**  
**Datasat/SDDS**  
**Colour by**  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing

The Deep South, 1858. Chained slaves being driven overland at night are halted by German bounty hunter Dr King Schultz, who demands to speak with one of their number, Django. Schultz is seeking information about the Brittle brothers, overseers at Django's last plantation. He kills the slavers and takes Django along with him on the hunt. Django performs so well in gunning down the Brittle brothers that Schultz takes him on as his apprentice and promises to help him find his wife Broomhilda, who has been sold downriver.

They eventually find her at Candyland, the plantation of Calvin J. Candie, an enthusiast of to-the-death 'mandingo fighting' between slaves. Schultz and Django gain access to Candyland by posing as mandingo experts, hoping to buy Broomhilda's freedom on the cheap. Candie's butler Stephen discovers their plan, and a shootout erupts, leaving Schultz and Candie dead and Django in chains again. Django talks his way out of irons and returns to Candyland, killing Stephen and his remaining white masters, and leaving with Broomhilda.



## Do Elephants Pray?

United Kingdom 2009  
Director: Paul Hills

### Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

"By a tree with naked feet I shed a tear, disarmed and moved before such purity." This untraceable quote from an "unknown Breton poet" begins director Paul Hills's spiritual adventure film – which is a very odd fish indeed, starting out in the karmic dead zone of a Shoreditch ad agency and ending in a mystic forest in Brittany.

The quote gives way to a sylvan montage of caterpillars, frogs and dappled light through trees, before the silence of the forest floor is disturbed by a naked man running for his dear life through the undergrowth. Coming to a lake, he is confronted with a doppelganger performing tai chi, before the film switches to a tai chi class in London and the scene is revealed to be the imaginings of Callum (Jonnie Hurn), a spiritually depleted adman with wooded visions on the brain.

Callum is clearly missing something that his current work – which involves trying to come up with a slogan for a new cranberry-derived alcopop – isn't providing. Caricatured in the broadest *Nathan Barley* brushstrokes, his workplace is an asinine hellhole of jostling egos and terrible ideas, peopled by grimly mugging performances from Marc Warren and John Last as two rival colleagues. Small wonder that when Callum glimpses a white rabbit disappearing down a rabbit hole, he chooses to follow it all the way down.

His rabbit is the alluringly mysterious French hippie Malika (Julie Dray), who begins popping up in his life, encouraging him to follow her every free-spirited whim and forget his impending work deadlines. A whirlwind of spontaneity, forever dashing, twirling or vanishing into thin air, this beautiful siren is half hell-for-leather screwball heroine, half schoolboy fantasy of a foreign-exchange student. Since she wants their 'first time' to be special, Callum – his quest spurred by lust more than existential inquiry – finds himself bunking off work to take



Pastures askew: Jonnie Hurn, Julie Dray

a trip to a 'lake of no return' in northern France.

Written by the lead actor, whose partner was reportedly the inspiration for Malika, *Do Elephants Pray?* is nothing if not intriguingly bonkers. Hurn's script is careful to balance each of this earth-mother's search-inside-yourself aphorisms and prayers to the trees with one of Callum's cynical Londoner cut-downs, but Callum seems so sceptical of, and irritated by, Malika's fruitcake mysticism that you wonder how long his libido will keep up the fight.

Is Callum being led up the garden path? Or, in going AWOL from work, losing his mobile phone, munching some *champignons* and being exposed to the swirling psychic energies of an Arthurian glade, does he stand to learn a vital lesson about his small place in the scheme of things? The most cuckoo aspect of Hills's film is that the anti-climactic endpoint is only a refiring of creative juices. It seems that the *raison d'être* of this particular trial of the spirit has been to sell more alcopops. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Paul Hills  
Jonnie Hurn  
**Written by**  
Jonnie Hurn  
**Director of Photography**  
Roger Bonnici  
**Editor**  
Caroline Richards  
**Production Designer**  
Seanne Grasso  
**Composer**

Marcel Barsotti  
**Sound Designer**  
Axle Cheeng  
**Costume Designer**  
Jade Page  
  
©Elephant Features  
**Production Companies**  
Amaranth Film  
Partners and Elephant  
Features presents  
**Executive Producers**

Neil Harris  
Kylie Maron  
Yoram Halberstam  
Steve DiMarco  
**Co-executive Producers**  
Astrud Turner  
Leon Turner

**Cast**  
Jonnie Hurn  
Callum Cutter

**Julie Dray**  
Malika  
**Marc Warren**  
Marlen  
**Rosie Fellner**  
Emma  
**Grace Vallorani**  
Caroline Sark  
**John Last**  
Jode  
**Jean-Baptiste Puech**  
soldier  
Cassandra French

Fahra  
**Dougal Porteous**  
hoody  
**Iain Lee**  
radio dj  
**Abi Titmuss**  
Miriam, head  
of Cremberry  
**Barry McGinlay**  
Tai Chi instructor  
  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Bluebell Films

London, the present. Callum works at an advertising agency and is struggling to come up with a campaign for a new alcopop. He takes tai chi classes after work, and has repeated visions of himself running naked through a forest. He has a chance encounter with free-spirited Frenchwoman Malika, and they begin an affair, though Malika insists that he tell nobody about her. For her birthday, Malika persuades Callum to bunk off work so that they can go camping together in the forests of Brittany. Despite an impending work deadline, he agrees to a day trip. However, as they trek further into the forest it becomes clear that they will have to stay the night. Malika tries to teach Callum to lose his ego and recognise his small place in the universe.

In Callum's unexplained absence, his boss asks rival colleague Marrien to lead the campaign pitch. Callum and Malika make love in their tent, but the next morning Malika has gone. Callum is discovered by a policeman, who tells him that he is trespassing in a military zone. When Malika reappears, she persuades Callum that they must go on into the forest to the 'lake of no return'. Reaching the lake, Malika and Callum take hallucinogens and make love again. Callum hallucinates, and Malika insists that the final step in his loss of ego is for her to throw him into the lake. He agrees and is thrown in, seemingly to his death. But as Marrien is about to deliver his pitch for the alcopop campaign, Callum marches into the office refreshed and with a great idea.

is the first film Tarantino has made without editor Sally Menke, who died in 2010; does her absence explain its lagging pace? Swollen by Tarantino's usual loquaciousness – there are so many monologue breaks it feels like a toastmasters' meeting – *Django Unchained* stretches towards three hours of screen time and has a rambler's tendency to repeat itself. At times this seems merely careless – Tarantino twice uses a fainting woman as a punchline – and at others it seems part of the master blueprint, as in the movie's double-climax.

A doubling motif, you see, is at the centre of *Django Unchained*, which features two interracial duos: Jamie Foxx's freedman Django and Christoph Waltz's hitman Dr King Schultz are pitted against Leonardo DiCaprio's master Calvin J. Candie and Samuel L. Jackson's head butler Stephen – certainly the more psychologically fascinating of the two pairs. Under Stephen's snowy mane lie the real brains at Candie's plantation 'Candyland', where he has free rein to talk back to his putative master. Candie is louche and irresponsible gentry, nursing an unseemly obsession with his sister, and DiCaprio visibly enjoys himself in the role, slurping a frou-frou coconut drink and hollering things like, "What's the point of having a nigger that speaks German if you can't wheel her out when you have a German guest?"

That word "nigger" pops up a lot, with dozens of different inflections – barked by Jackson, evilly drawled by Don Johnson's 'Big Daddy', mouthed with sweet-toothed relish by DiCaprio. You may recall that, shortly after the release of *Jackie Brown* (1997), Tarantino caught fire from Spike Lee for his generous use of the word in that film's script. He was defended then by none other than Jackson – and Jackson's Uncle Tom character here seems to parody the role he's played in Tarantino's career. Stephen is the true antagonist of the piece as Django is the true hero.

One sees how this structuring duality worked on the page – but the movie disappears in the canyon between intention and execution. Waltz, justly made a star by *Basterds*, again pinches Tarantino's monologues with the fluting inflections of his native Viennese German, but his Dr Schultz is most often merely a precious, prim kook. He has no particular rapport with Foxx, whose journey from servant to master of his own destiny is conveyed in various shades of stolidity. The key scene, in which Django wriggles out of captivity by feeding his jailers a line of jive – in Tarantino's world, talk is power – is among the movie's worst.

All this is not to say that Tarantino doesn't have the right today to address history's rankling grievances, but what's sorely missing in *Django Unchained* is any sense of vital engagement with history – that, and vitality itself. As *Django* betrays such cooing pleasure at cartoon violence directed against whites, it's hard to take its outrage at hot boxing and unleashed dog attacks against slaves seriously – in *Basterds*, Tarantino at least knew that depicting Auschwitz was beyond his range. The horror that *Django Unchained* expresses isn't of slavery, finally, but of a filmmaker attempting historical tragedy while shackled by his own supercilious persona. **S**

# Everyday

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Michael Winterbottom



**Jailhouse flock: Shirley Henderson (right), Kirk siblings**

## Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Michael Winterbottom was reportedly looking to cast just one small boy for his drama about a young mother coping with daily life while her husband serves a prison sentence. Apparently, the director was so impressed by four-year-old Shaun Kirk's cheeky, expressive face that he revised his plans and decided to make the film with all four Kirk siblings, who ranged at the start of the process from three to eight years old. Over the course of five years, he revisited the children once or twice a year to shoot scenes with them and Shirley Henderson, who takes the role of their hard-pressed mother Karen, and John Simm, who plays Ian, the jailbird who must try to keep the threads of his family life together via a series of awkward encounters in cheerless prison visiting rooms.


As a result of this unusual shooting schedule, we watch the child actors grow and age, a striking visual marker of passing time and one that could never be realistically achieved by clever casting or special effects. This, combined with some stunning, lingering shots of idyllic countryside locations and Michael Nyman's urgently romantic score, creates a strong and charismatic first impression. Unfortunately, the unfolding film, with its improvised, incidental structure, never manages to be as engaging as these simple visual and musical signifiers. Instead, as we follow the children to school or watch them playing in the garden, it feels as though Winterbottom is sharing his characters' struggle to keep in touch emotionally under the strained conditions he has imposed. For the audience, it becomes impossible to see past his neat initial set-up: denied anything like a plot by the freeform structure, we're left simply to observe these basically unremarkable children as anthropological specimens, and to ponder Winterbottom's cute methodology from a distance. The very fact that these are real siblings, captured in real time, ends up forbidding any sense of intimacy.

Instead, we are tantalised by spectral plot points that fizzle into bathos. The oldest boy,

Robert, looks like he might turn into a bit of a scrapper, or perhaps a runaway, but his antics never really pitch him into danger. Ian gets into trouble with the prison after a day-release with the family – apparently he has been pressured by another inmate to bring drugs back in with him, though how exactly he is punished for this crime is left unclear. Karen, meanwhile, is tempted into a relationship with a man she meets while working in a pub; again, this marital hazard never really seems to threaten her inevitable reunion with her husband. Whether this repeated denial of narrative interest is a result of Winterbottom's hands-off approach, or is a deliberate trope intended to underline Ian's feeling of distance and powerlessness, it doesn't help the sense of emotional inertia that hangs around the film.

There's something disquieting, too, about the Olympian viewpoint we are invited to share as Winterbottom gazes minutely at his human exhibits. On the one hand, he wants us to agree that a woman with four children and a husband in prison is so extraordinary and exotic that it's thrilling just to watch her putting her kids to bed or stacking shelves in a dead-end job. On the other, it's hard to

believe in the plausibility of this supposedly fascinating predicament, and again it's Winterbottom's attempt to access 'reality' that gets in the way. We might expect Karen and her kids to struggle with money, but their house (Winterbottom used the Kirks' real home in rural Norfolk) is perfectly comfortable and they never want for anything – unless you count using public transport as tantamount to abject pauperism. Even the various prisons (Winterbottom used real prisons as locations) look okay; when Ian talks about how terrified he is in there, it's hard to square his anxiety with the neatly dressed, quietly queuing inmates the director was permitted to film.

It's a real shame to have wasted these actors by refusing to construct a proper story around them – both easily have the range and subtlety to shine in quiet, understated pieces, but it's hard for them to carry such a diffuse project through its protracted gestation, and they come away, like us, empty-handed. A few moments of charm and big East Anglian skies are not enough to rescue this film from its own subject-matter – banality. The bare details of everyday life are just not that interesting – if they were, we wouldn't need cinema. 

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Melissa Parmenter  
**Written by**  
Laurence Coriat  
Michael  
Winterbottom  
**Photography**  
James Clarke  
Sean Bobbitt  
Marcel Zyskind

Simon Tindall  
Anne Marie  
Lean Vercoe  
**Editing**  
Mags Arnold  
Paul Monaghan  
**Score composed by/Piano**  
Michael Nyman  
**Sound**

Will Whale  
Adrian Bell  
Paul Cameron  
  
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Limited  
  
**Production Company**  
Revolution Films

**Executive Producer**  
Andrew Eaton

**Cast**  
John Simm  
Ian Ferguson  
Shirley Henderson  
Karen Ferguson

**Shaun Kirk**  
Shaun Ferguson  
**Robert Kirk**  
Robert Ferguson  
**Stephanie Kirk**  
Stephanie Ferguson  
**Katrina Kirk**  
Katrina Ferguson

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[L85:1]  
  
**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

**England, present day. While Ian serves a five-year prison sentence, his wife Karen and four children, Shaun, Robert, Katrina and Stephanie, cope with daily life without him: the children go to school and Karen takes on jobs at a DIY store and a pub. Shaun and Robert get into trouble for fighting bullies who taunt them about their father being in jail, but occasional prison visits keep the family relationships alive, and Ian eventually**

**earns the privilege of a day-release with his wife and kids. He is caught smuggling drugs back into the prison, but eventually he earns an overnight home visit and, his time served, is finally released. He returns home to be welcomed by his family, and although Karen's admission that she has had an affair with another man temporarily causes a rift between them, they overcome this and face the future as a strong family unit.**



# Flight

USA 2012

Director: Robert Zemeckis

Certificate 15 138m 26s

## Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Rather grandly self-regarding relative to what it finally is, Robert Zemeckis's high-profile awards-season star vehicle comes lugging two burdensome loads – the restrictive nature of the addiction melodrama, and the genie's-bottle sense of isolated Hollywood narcissism from which so many addictions and self-heroising recovery tales have been spawned. It is difficult, as with few other Industry films of recent vintage, to embrace the idiosyncrasies and maturities of *Flight*'s textures without also embracing the pretentious and self-congratulating circumstances in which the film was surely produced and executed. No other film this past year wants us to feel as badly that its director, its screenwriter (John Gatins) and its star (Denzel Washington) are all making a courageous sacrifice for our benefit. But aren't all addiction stories noble and purifying trials by fire for their subjects, and just gossip for the rest of us? Either way, here is Zemeckis going full-adult, as he has generally preferred not to (and perhaps never has, if *Contact* and *Cast Away* are his only other bids for grown-up gravity), and the film is post-pubertal with a vengeance – writhing with bad behaviour, dope hijinks, raunchy jokes, gratuitous nudity, sex work, defiant boozing and, in accumulating doses, the guilt and anxiety that inevitably accompany all of the above.

Which sounds, and plays, a little adolescent, frankly. Still, credit must be given to the film's oddball structure. The opening airliner flight, during which Washington's relaxed pilot Whip Whitaker is thoroughly soused, ends in an equipment-malfunction deadfall, a white-knuckle disaster that is only saved by the inordinately collected pilot (once he wakes up) inverting the plane and sliding it to a crash-landing in an open field. Radically expending its climax up front, as it were, Zemeckis's film then settles into the story's meat, to which the plane crash is merely new fuel poured on a neglected fire. Washington's seasoned alkie is a career inebriate of a high-tolerance kind who could press on professionally without event for decades. But this is a courtesy that the crash, and its legal dilemmas, will not allow him, and so *Flight*'s long and dachshund-shaped second act addresses the man's every resistance, denial and evasion as he is suddenly placed under a social and bureaucratic microscope. Whitaker is one of the movies' very few functioning alcoholic characters – it's normally too nuanced a life paradigm to drive a Hollywood film, which prefers as we all do the myth that 24/7 drinkers are immediately and universally obvious to us all (and aren't allowed to pilot airliners).

But additions of any kind are rarely attractive or even suspenseful ordeals, and so it is here – the unvarying, dead-eyed dedication to intoxicants is all Washington has to work with for most of the film, leavened only by irate defensive outbursts and glowering self-pity. It's a strange and limiting 'serious' role for Washington, who has oozed far more intelligence, dimensionality and ambivalence in far pulpier films – even in 2012's *Safe House*.

The should-I-get-high struggle need not be dull or unrevealing – the recent Norwegian



Miles too high club: Denzel Washington

film *Oslo, August 31st* is *Flight*'s corrective in almost every way – but it easily can be, a fact that's routinely overlooked in Hollywood. It's also a fairly predictable subgenre, in which the eventual arrival at a state of salvation and a speech in front of a group meeting is de rigueur. Zemeckis, whose last three films were motion-captured animated fairytales, lets a cartoon or two slip through – John Goodman's rock 'n' roll house-call drug dealer is a figment of somebody's jonesing imagination – but his determination to not shy away from Whitaker's seedier side doesn't mitigate the drill any more than it feels qualitatively genuine. (Unsurprisingly, the issue of to what degree Whitaker's high-ness may have actually helped him land the plane as he did is never raised, not even by Whitaker.)

Crash sequence aside, Zemeckis has suppressed his for-all-ages showman ego only to have made a film that, visually, is anonymous and emphatic, and covers the same narrative territory as an hour of episodic TV. The constant

engagement with Christ and Christianity – crucifixes and Last Suppers in every room, in every scene – only cheapens the posturing further. Certainly, any dozen alcoholic movie sagas, just starting with *The Lost Weekend* (1945), could out-grunge *Flight*, and the unintended effect is that the legal mechanics hovering over Whitaker always seem substantially more interesting than the 'real story' to which they were intended only as raised stakes.

It's a movie of contextual disappointments, knock-kneed by its own pedigree and profile – were it a Canadian indie peopled by non-stars, say, then its belligerent character study might have exuded a little sincerity and resonance. On the other hand, in a few years' time, when films sometimes gain authority and meaning, Zemeckis's movie will feel only less crucial, not more so, as all of Zemeckis's films have – another dipsomaniac daydream about which everyone will remember feeling so proud, once upon a time. Ⓢ

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Walter F. Parkes  
Laurie MacDonald  
Steve Starkey  
Robert Zemeckis  
Jack Rapke  
**Written by**  
John Gatins  
**Director of Photography**  
Don Burgess  
**Edited by**  
Jeremiah O'Driscoll  
**Production Designer**  
Nelson Coates

**Music**  
Alan Silvestri  
**Sound Designer/Re-Recording Mixer**  
Randy Thom  
**Costume Designer**  
Louise Frogley

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**Production Companies**  
Paramount Pictures presents

an ImageMovers production  
A Parkes + MacDonald production  
A Robert Zemeckis film  
With the participation of the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office  
**Executive Producers**  
Cherryllanne Martin

**Cast**  
**Denzel Washington**  
Whip Whitaker  
**Don Cheadle**  
Hugh Lang  
**Kelly Reilly**  
Nicole  
**John Goodman**  
Harling Mays  
**Bruce Greenwood**  
Charlie Anderson  
**Brian Geraghty**  
Ken Evans  
**Tamara Tunie**

Margaret Thomason  
**Nadine Velazquez**  
Katerina Marquez  
**Peter Gerety**  
Avington Carr  
**Garcelle Beauvais**  
Deana  
**Melissa Leo**  
Ellen Block

**Datasat/Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Paramount Pictures UK

12,459 ft +0 frames

**Florida, the present. Having woken up next to a nude air stewardess, a drink and a line of cocaine, airline pilot Whip Whitaker boards his flight to Atlanta. After takeoff, Whitaker hands over control to his co-pilot and takes a nap. He is awakened when a mechanical malfunction causes the plane to plummet earthwards. Whitaker ingeniously manages to crash-land the plane in a field. He awakes in hospital with minor injuries and finds himself being hailed as a hero, since all but six of the passengers and crew survived (though his stewardess lover is among the dead). After the incident, Whitaker avoids the press frenzy. It transpires that blood tests done in hospital have revealed his drink and drug use and may lead to charges. Whitaker continues to drink steadily, and forms a bond with an ex-junkie he met in the hospital. He attempts to stop drinking several times, but without success.**

**Feeling guilty about the death of the stewardess and his soured relationship with his teenage son, Whitaker knows that he faces prison if his on-the-job inebriation is revealed. As he prepares to face the investigating commission, he struggles with whether to stay sober and lie about his drinking, or succumb to his demons and finally face the world honestly.**

## Hitchcock

USA/United Kingdom/Australia 2012  
Director: Sacha Gervasi  
Certificate 12A 98m 12s

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"It sits there refusing to come to life," laments Alfred Hitchcock (Anthony Hopkins) about the initial cut of *Psycho* – and regrettably, the same could be said of Sacha Gervasi's movie. The plot is partly based on Stephen Rebello's non-fiction book *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*, on to which has been grafted a tale of rifts within Hitchcock's long-term marriage to Alma Reville (Helen Mirren). While Hitch is paying cumbersome attentions to his latest fetishised blonde, Janet Leigh (Scarlett Johansson), Alma, according to this account, is engaged on a flirtatious relationship with a younger writer, Whitfield Cook (Danny Huston), who worked on the scripts of *Stage Fright* and *Strangers on a Train*. There may be some truth in this: Patrick McGilligan's biography *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* suggests as much. But these two elements, the factual and the possibly fictional, never mesh properly and all too often trip each other up.

The physically commanding Mirren, in any case, makes anomalous casting for Alma, generally described as small and birdlike. (Imelda Staunton, who plays her in this year's other Hitch biopic, Julian Jarrold's *The Girl*, would seem a better fit both physically and temperamentally.) Hopkins, lavishly padded, sticks out his lower lip and makes a fair shot at the orotund, lugubrious diction, although at moments of passion he speeds up, loses the mock-cockney and essentially gives us Hopkins-in-a-strop. The script tosses in a few of Hitch's off-colour jokes: "Call me Hitch. Hold the cock," he tells Janet Leigh on their first meeting. Johansson, introduced (as she was in *Lost in Translation*) via a close-up of her bottom, captures something of Leigh's gentle malleability. "Compared to Orson Welles, he's a sweetheart," she remarks of Hitch to the more sceptical Vera Miles (Jessica Biel). The most impressive impersonation, though, is James D'Arcy's pitch-perfect Anthony Perkins; disappointingly, he's on screen for barely five minutes.

Presumably due to copyright restrictions, we never get to see anything of the finished *Psycho*, while Danny Elfman's score makes cautious gestures in the direction of Bernard Herrmann. To compensate for these absences, John J. McLaughlin's script tries for a few 'sensational' moments: Hitch spying on Vera Miles's dressing-room via a Norman Bates-style peephole in the wall or, dissatisfied with an extra's efforts in the shower scene, wielding the knife himself at a terrified Leigh. Even more awkwardly, we have the spirit of real-life killer Ed Gein showing up periodically as adviser or confidant. Such clumsy artifices undermine any sense of authenticity, as does some on-the-nose dialogue. "I put up with these fantasy romances with your leading ladies," Alma tells Hitch. "How would you know what really goes on between a man and a woman?" Gervasi, who brought humour and sympathy to his 'real-life *Spinal Tap*' documentary *Anvil! The Story of Anvil* (2008), seems out of his depth here, and all attempts to add psychological complexity fall flat. You spend most of the film wishing you were watching *Psycho* instead, which presumably wasn't quite the idea. ☹



Family plot: Helen Mirren, Anthony Hopkins

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Ivan Reitman  
Tom Pollock  
Joe Medjuck  
Tom Thayer  
Alan Barnette

#### Screenplay

John J. McLaughlin  
Based on the book

*Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* by

Stephen Rebello

#### Director of

Photography

Jeff Cronenweth

#### Film Editor

Pamela Martin

#### Production

Designer

Judy Becker

#### Music

Danny Elfman

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Edward Tise

#### Costume Designer

Julie Weiss

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Century Fox Film

Corporation, Cold

Spring Pictures

LLC and Dune

Entertainment

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**Production Companies**

Fox Searchlight Pictures presents in association with Cold Spring Pictures

a Montecito Picture Company/Barnette/Thayer production

Made in association with Dune Entertainment, Ingenious Media and Big Screen Productions

**Executive Producers**

Ali Bell Richard Middleton

#### Cast

Anthony Hopkins

Alfred Hitchcock

Helen Mirren

Alma Reville

Scarlett Johansson

Janet Leigh

Toni Collette

Peggy

Danny Huston

Whitfield Cook

Jessica Biel

Vera Miles

Michael Stuhlbarg

Lew Wasserman

James D'Arcy

Anthony Perkins

Michael Wincott

Ed Gein

Kurtwood Smith

Geoffrey Shurlock

Richard Portnow

Barney Balaban

**Dolby Digital/**

**Datasat/SDDS**

**In Colour**

**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

**8,838ft + 0 frames**

**A Wisconsin farm, 1944. Ed Gein kills his brother with a shovel – the first of his murders. Fifteen years later, in Hollywood, Alfred Hitchcock's 'North by Northwest' is premiered to huge acclaim. Hitch starts looking for his next subject, and is attracted by Robert Bloch's novel 'Psycho', based on the Gein killings. The head of Paramount, Barney Balaban, hates the idea. With the support of his agent Lew Wasserman, Hitch decides to make the film for \$800,000 and finance it himself. Hitchcock's wife and longtime script adviser Alma Reville has her doubts, especially since the plan involves mortgaging their house.**

**Alma is distracted by her personal project: collaborating on a script with younger writer Whitfield Cook. Missing Alma's help and support, and fearing that she may be contemplating an affair, Hitch still goes ahead, casting Janet Leigh (the latest of his 'Hitchcock blondes'). Anthony Perkins and, in a support role, Vera Miles – who he feels previously betrayed him by becoming pregnant at an inopportune moment.**

**Shooting starts. Under strain, Hitch collapses and is confined to bed. Alma directs the film in his absence. Visiting Cook at his beach house, she finds him having sex with a woman and storms off. The initial cut of 'Psycho' is screened for the Paramount executives, who loathe it, and MPAA censor Geoffrey Shurlock threatens to deny it a certificate. Hitch himself is unhappy with the film, but Alma comes into the cutting-room with him and together they refashion it. When Paramount limits 'Psycho's' release to two theatres, Hitch devises a sensational advertising campaign and the film becomes the biggest box-office hit of his career. Hitch reaffirms his devotion to Alma.**

## The Hobbit An Unexpected Journey

USA/New Zealand 2012, Director: Peter Jackson  
Certificate 12A 169m 0s

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

*The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) has an entry called 'Little Big', which refers to fantasy's frequent transits from little worlds to huge ones. The theme of 'Little Big' pervades *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*. Based on J.R.R. Tolkien's book, it goes from a hole in the ground to an epic, perilous landscape, following Martin Freeman's redoubtable furry-footed everyman Bilbo as he traverses a world beyond his imagination. Even the opening minutes contrast two underground worlds on absurdly opposed scales. There's Bilbo's snug little hobbit-home with its cheery round green door and wooden passageways; and then there's a vast glittering dwarf kingdom, plunging down bottomless like the alien Krell city in *Forbidden Planet* (1956).

'Little Big' has a different, ironic connotation for *The Hobbit*. The film runs nearly three hours and begins a trilogy, a mammoth saga based on one slim children's book. Yet it's a book that covers more story than many far thicker volumes. Single paragraphs or pages suggest titanic action scenes, or glimpse at whole adventures unseen, spanning generations of imagined history. Everyone knows that Tolkien's sequel to *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, ballooned into an epic several times as long, already filmed as a trilogy (2001-03) by Peter Jackson. It's less well known that Tolkien continually revised and rethought *The Hobbit* after its publication, as if he wondered himself how big it should be.

Jackson's film draws on the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*, where Tolkien rationalised *The Hobbit's* plot, scaling it up towards the dimensions of its sequel. (Today, this would be called a 'retcon'.) Bilbo thinks he's on a one-off adventure, to help a group of dwarves slay a dragon and reclaim their stolen kingdom. Even in the book, the story goes past that; the mission's catastrophic consequences are presumably for the third film. In Jackson's expanded story, though, the adventure is already bigger than its heroes know, as Ian McKellen's wizard Gandalf deploys them like chess pieces, plotting pre-emptive manoeuvres for the war to come in *Rings*.

These contrasting perspectives are suggested in *The Hobbit's* first minutes. The destruction of the dwarf kingdom is accompanied by a high-flown voiceover delivered in bardic style by Ian Holm (who plays the older Bilbo in the *Rings* cycle). Then we cut to Bilbo's cosy hollow and the book's famed first line, spoken in a children's-tale register ("In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit..."), and then into the comic invasion of Bilbo's burrow by 13 dwarves.

Viewers who revere Jackson's *Rings* trilogy may be alienated by the clashing tones. As someone who was largely unmoved by the first *Rings* film (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 2001) and ambivalent about the trilogy as a whole, I found *The Hobbit's* shifting scales bracing and enjoyable. It's a far more humorous fantasy than *Rings*, seeing absurdity in grandeur and vice versa. There's an openly pantomime, theatrical quality to Bilbo's home invasion, which makes the decompressed pace more acceptable. (If only the long film could have followed theatre and had an interval.)



## Hyde Park on Hudson

USA/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Roger Michell

Certificat 12A 94m 40s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Historical film dramas on an intimate scale seem particularly welcome just now. Audiences drawn to *The King's Speech* or *W.E.*, or even *My Week with Marilyn*, reflect a hunger for royal or celebrity history 'off the record'.

Congruent with this obsession with how a private life inflects a public one is Roger Michell's likeable but uneven comedy-drama speculating about a pair of 'special relationships' that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt allegedly cultivated in 1939. Tearing about his idyllic upstate New York estate in a specially adapted car, he cajoles his shy spinster cousin Daisy into an affair (the Ford jouncing coyly in a clover field as she pleasures him is as explicit as this decorous movie gets). Meanwhile FDR's twinkly geniality manoeuvres the socially sticky visit of the nervous King George VI into a burgeoning friendship that will save England in the coming war.

These two strands, both fairly slight, are conducted in different tones (the cosy comedy of the royal visit contrasting with the increasingly strained romance with Daisy), making for an eventually uneasy whole. Screenwriter Richard Nelson takes Daisy's affair in a spikier direction after its winsome beginnings, plunging her into a scene of betrayal as she stumbles across FDR sleeping with his secretary Missy. As Daisy, Laura Linney is first-rate, whether on the edges of gatherings hugging scraps of presidential affection to herself, or mute with disgust at his betrayal. Chased through the woods at night by FDR's valet and secretary, hell-bent on ensuring her silence, she seems suddenly to inhabit a different movie from the Windsors' gentle Anglo-American culture-clash. One can only assume that Michell and Nelson were aiming for a shades-of-grey portrait of FDR, to put some complexity into the heroic, avuncular leader portrayed in films such as *Warm Springs* (2005). Bill Murray aids them with a loose but effective reading of Roosevelt (compared with Daniel Day-Lewis's Lincoln reincarnation, it's an affectionate approximation) which concentrates on FDR's charisma but also reveals a wily, hard-nosed streak. To complement this, Samuel West and Olivia Colman bring similar light and shade to Bertie and Elizabeth, sounding notes of timidity or bossiness that are absent from the stoical royal couple of *The King's Speech*.

That *other* movie about George VI wrestling with his stammer and his royal duties casts a long shadow over this one. Nelson created *Hyde Park on Hudson* as a Radio 3



The President's speech: Bill Murray



Shire love: Ian McKellen

The home invasion is mirrored by a scarier but deliciously bizarre scene of Jackson's invention, when the tree-home of a nature-wizard (Sylvester McCoy) is besieged by monsters, while he frantically protects an anthropomorphised hedgehog. For some viewers, this will be embarrassing whimsy; for others, a welcome intrusion of daffy, freewheeling fantasy into Jackson's clompingly monumental style, which itself feels more human here. Even a dry meeting between Gandalf and his long-lived colleagues Saruman (Christopher Lee) and Galadriel (Cate Blanchett) is leavened by the secret affection that Galadriel shows Gandalf, letting us wonder about their relationship in some past age.

As Bilbo, Freeman appears confusticated but inherently sensible. In a pointed change from the book, he emphatically chooses to embark on the adventure (albeit with sly persuasion from Gandalf), rather than being hustled into it. He improvises child-pleasing strategies

against pea-brained trolls; later in the film, he's dispatched to an underground limbo by a certain magic ring. There, he silently decides to spare an enemy who terrifies him like no other, in the film's best-acted scene; though, granted, his foe is the film's best actor. This is the infantile CGI ghoul Gollum, played once more by Andy Serkis, who's even more hilarious, scary and pitiful than he was in the *Rings* films.

This review follows a screening of the HFR (48fps) edition of the film, shown in 3D. As has been said elsewhere, the format gives a clarity to the picture that recalls TV drama or indeed live theatre. Given *The Hobbit's* stylisations, clashing registers and Christmas-friendly theatrics, the format seems quite appropriate, whether intentionally or not. Even the 'fake'-looking effects, such as the heroes crashing down a pit à la *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), seem authentically, exuberantly fake in a way that old-school TV fantasy fans learned to love long ago. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Carolynne Cunningham  
Zane Weiner  
Frank Walsh  
Peter Jackson  
**Screenplay**  
Frank Walsh  
Philippa Boyens  
Peter Jackson  
Guillermo del Toro  
Based on the novel  
[*The Hobbit* or *There and Back Again*]  
by J.R.R. Tolkien  
**Director of Photography**  
Andrew Lesnie  
**Edited by**

#### Jabez Olssen

#### Production Designer

Dan Hennah  
**Music Composed, Orchestrated and Conducted by**  
Howard Shore  
**Supervising Sound Editors**  
Brent Burge  
Chris Ward  
**Costume Designers**  
Ann Maskrey  
Richard Taylor  
Bob Buck  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Glenn Boswell  
**Visual Effects/Animation**

#### Created by

Weta Digital Ltd  
©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. (US, Canada & New Line foreign territories)  
©Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. and Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (all other territories)  
**Production Companies**  
New Line Cinema and Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer Pictures present a Wingnut Films production  
**Executive Producers**  
Alan Horn  
Toby Emmerich  
Ken Kamins  
Carolyn Blackwood

#### Cast

**Ian McKellen**  
Gandalf the Grey  
**Martin Freeman**  
Bilbo Baggins  
**Richard Armitage**  
Thorin Oakenshield  
**Ken Stott**  
Balin

#### Cate Blanchett

Galadriel  
**Ian Holm**  
old Bilbo  
**Christopher Lee**  
Saruman  
**Hugo Weaving**  
Elrond  
**Elijah Wood**  
Frodo Baggins  
**Andy Serkis**  
Gollum  
**Sylvester McCoy**  
Radagast  
**Manu Bennett**  
Azog

**Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS/PRP**

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

**Some screenings presented in 3D**

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros  
Distributors (UK)

**15,210 ft + 0 frames**

**IMAX prints**  
165m 24s  
238.176 ft  
3D

Middle-Earth. The great wizard Gandalf brings a band of 13 dwarves, led by exiled prince Thorin Oakenshield, to the snug home of hobbit Bilbo Baggins, who is shocked by their arrival. The dwarves intend to reclaim their lost kingdom, which has been conquered by a terrible dragon called Smaug. Inspired by their cause, Bilbo joins their company.

Their long journey takes them through battles with monstrous trolls, goblins and mountain giants. Gandalf is worried by reports that Middle-Earth is sickening. Crossing a mountain range, Bilbo's group is pulled into the subterranean domain of the goblins.

Bilbo becomes separated from the others; at an underground lake, he confronts a ghoulish, solitary creature called Gollum. After beating him at a game of riddles, Bilbo escapes with Gollum's most prized possession – a ring that turns its wearer invisible.

Beyond the mountains, the group is waylaid by goblins led by the one-handed Azog, Thorin's most bitter enemy. During the fight, Bilbo saves Thorin's life; the dwarves, Gandalf and Bilbo are carried to safety by giant eagles. Previously scornful of the hobbit, Thorin thanks Bilbo fulsomely, as the party prepares for the next stage of the journey.

play in 2009, but there's much thematic overlap with *The King's Speech* (duty versus disability, an unlikely friendship) and it doesn't do this subtler film any favours. *Hyde Park* is also over-discreet about its blend of history and conjecture, since it is based on the diaries of Margaret Suckley (the real-life Daisy) – which don't explicitly prove an affair with Roosevelt. As Linney's wry narration steers us through Daisy's trysts and the Windsors' acclimatisation, we can't discern fact from fiction.

Roosevelt's illicit 'arrangements' are viewed kindly, however, with the glowing visuals, lovingly detailed period production design and Jeremy Sams's syrupy score all evoking a plangent nostalgia for a more gracious, less intrusive era. The idea that a regiment of women colluded to organise FDR's infidelities may seem extraordinary to us in an age obsessed with transparency, where US generals endure trial by global media for similar infractions. *Hyde Park on Hudson*, though soft-centred about history, is engagingly sophisticated about historical mores. Daisy's verdict that, "People saw what they wanted to see" applies not only to Roosevelt's disability, but also to his peccadilloes. **C**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Kevin Loader  
Roger Michell  
David Aukin  
**Written by**  
Richard Nelson  
**Director of Photography**  
Lol Crawley  
**Edited by**  
Nicolas Gaster  
**Production Designer**  
Simon Bowles  
**Music**  
Jeremy Sams  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Danny Hambrook  
**Costume Designer**  
Dinah Collin  
  
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and Film4 present

a Free Range Film/  
Daybreak Pictures  
production  
A Roger Michell Film  
Made with the  
support of the  
UK Film Council's  
Development Fund  
**Executive Producer**  
Tessa Ross

**Cast**  
**Bill Murray**  
Franklin Delano  
Roosevelt, 'FDR'  
**Laura Linney**  
Margaret Suckley,  
'Daisy'  
**Samuel West**  
King George VI,  
'Bertie'  
**Olivia Colman**  
Queen Elizabeth  
**Elizabeth Marvel**  
Marguerite  
LeHand, 'Missy'  
**Elizabeth Wilson**

Mrs Sara Ann  
Roosevelt  
**Eleanor Bron**  
Mrs Woodbury  
Langdon,  
Daisy's aunt  
**Olivia Williams**  
Eleanor Roosevelt  
**Martin McDougall**  
Tommy  
**Andrew Havill**  
Cameron  
**Nancy Baldwin**  
Mrs Astor

**Dolby Digital/  
Datasat**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Ire

8,520 ft +0 frames

Upstate New York, June 1939. Spinster Daisy is called to see her sixth cousin, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, at his country estate at Hyde Park on Hudson, to distract him from the burdens of state. They become friends, and eventually begin a secret affair. King George VI ('Bertie') and Queen Elizabeth visit the estate, to win Roosevelt's support for England in the coming war. A mistrustful Elizabeth suspects Eleanor Roosevelt of wanting to humiliate them. Roosevelt befriends Bertie, bonding over his own disability and the king's stutter. One night, a devastated Daisy discovers that Roosevelt's secretary Missy is also his mistress. Missy fails to persuade Daisy that there is room for both of them in his life. Daisy confronts Roosevelt and breaks off the affair. At a photo-opportunity picnic, Roosevelt forces Daisy to join the royal party. Bertie eats a hotdog; the resulting newspaper photograph wins him American popularity and seals his friendship with Roosevelt. After months of refusing to see Roosevelt, Daisy forgives him, resumes the affair and becomes friends with Missy. Daisy's voiceover reveals that she and Roosevelt were close for the rest of his life.

## I Give It a Year

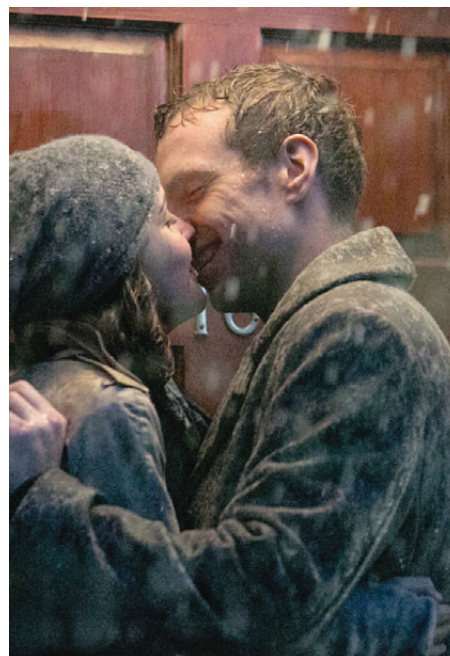
United Kingdom/France/Germany/Luxembourg 2012  
Director: Dan Mazer

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The marital-crisis comedy is a difficult thing to get right, requiring a just-so humour-to-feeling ratio. Surely at the apex of the genre is the first act of the Neil Simon-scripted *Plaza Suite* (1971), which we remember for the warmth of Maureen Stapleton's performance; her character Karen goes from sharp-witted wifely chaffing to the anguished vulnerability of an older woman whose only options are to turn a blind eye to her husband's infidelity or consent to a life without love or companionship.

Regrettably, *I Give It a Year* falls in a more contemporary, ephemeral category: hilarious in the slapstick, un-PC mode but direly lacking that essential investment in its characters. Writer-director Dan Mazer, whose partnership with Sacha Baron Cohen has produced well-loved comedic satires *Brüno* (2009), the Oscar-nominated *Borat* (2006) and *The Dictator* (2012), surprises with his first foray into scripted romantic comedy. *I Give It a Year* finds Nat (Rose Byrne, the pushy maid of honour in *Bridesmaids*) and Josh (Rafe Spall) nine months into married life and fidgeting in the knowledge that they would be better off apart. In a framing-device counselling session – presided over by an indiscreet, indecently curious Olivia Colman – husband and wife reel off (cue flashbacks) the sticking points in their wedded life so far, but keep secret the insurmountable: they both have eyes for another. Novelist Josh keeps a candle burning for ex-girlfriend Chloe (Anna Faris), while advertising creative Nat lusts after smooth-talking, smooth-coiffed client Guy (Simon Baker).

It's a buttoned-up tug-of-war between two thirtysomethings who won't or can't accept their mistake. They are stereotypically 'English', chary with the uncomfortable truth, and there's humour in watching them tangle with what's expected of a couple in the honeymoon flush: Nat turns pale to see Josh overstuffing the bin; he revolts inwardly when she warbles pop-anthem malapropisms. The joke gets tired, however, especially as it becomes clear that *I Give It a Year* – like its protagonists – hasn't



Split cute: Rose Byrne, Rafe Spall

the backbone to mature out of its comfort zone into something other and better for everyone concerned. This continual riffing on the same theme at the expense of character is self-defeating, the characters so much at fault they're unlikeable, so that when the world is put to rights in the final scene we feel nothing.

There's still much to praise here though: up-to-the-minute, high-frequency humour and an accomplished cast providing more than adequate entertainment. The proven-versatile Spall excels as the breezy every-bloke and achieves a sustaining light and shade. But Faris, a talented comedic actress, is wasted, a sitting-hen and sounding-board for chauvinist best man Stephen Merchant. In the end, *I Give It a Year* feels more like a gag reel than a fully shod feature: funny like clockwork, but as cursory with technique and as insubstantial. **C**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Kris Thykier  
**Written by**  
Dan Mazer  
**Director of Photography**  
Ben Davis  
**Editor**  
Tony Cranstoun  
**Production Designer**  
Simon Elliott  
**Music**  
Ilan Eshkeri  
**Production**

**Sound Mixer**  
Tim Barker  
**Costume Designer**  
Charlotte Walter

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Films S.A.R.L., TF1  
Films Production  
S.A.S., Studiocanal  
Film GmbH  
**Production Companies**  
Studiocanal presents  
in association  
with Anton Capital

Entertainment a  
Starcrossed Films,  
Paradis Films, TF1  
Films Production,  
Studiocanal Film  
co-production with  
the participation  
of Canal+, Cine+,  
TF1 and Lovefilm  
a Working Title  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Debra Hayward  
Liza Chasin  
Olivier Courson  
Ron Halpern

**Cast**  
**Rose Byrne**  
Nat  
**Anna Faris**  
Chloe  
**Rafe Spall**  
Josh  
**Simon Baker**  
Guy  
**Minnie Driver**  
Naomi  
**Jason Flemyng**  
Hugh  
**Stephen Merchant**  
Danny

**Jane Asher**  
Diana  
**Daisy Haggard**  
Helen  
**Terence Harvey**  
Alec  
**Clare Higgins**  
Elaine  
**Kerry Howard**  
Clare  
**Tim Key**  
Alan  
**Nigel Planer**  
Brian  
**Olivia Colman**  
Linda

**Dolby Digital  
In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

London, the present. Nine months into wedded life, Nat and Josh attend marriage counselling and relate how they came to grow apart, which we see in flashbacks.

After their honeymoon, advertising creative Nat removes her wedding ring when she meets with handsome new client Guy. She fans the flame of their chemistry over the next few months until forced to confess her deceit. Meanwhile Josh and his ex-girlfriend Chloe share a kiss. In an accidental

meeting between all four, Nat and Josh push Guy and Chloe together, but an awkward double date makes Nat decide to have a one-night stand with Guy.

At the end of their counselling session, husband and wife agree to forge ahead for their one-year milestone. On their first anniversary, however, they reach a mutual decision to separate. The two go in search of Chloe and Guy, who are now dating each other. The couples swap partners and kiss.



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# I Wish

Japan 2011

Director: Koreeda Hirokazu

## Reviewed by Tony Rayns

In his latest film Koreeda Hirokazu picks up where Edward Yang left off in *A One and a Two...* (*Yi Yi*), with a searching and immersively moving account of three generations in one family: the mild dottiness of the grandparents as they look for ways to occupy the hours and days, the emotional and financial problems of the parents who have been separated for six months, and most of all the joys, fears and dreams of the kids. Koreeda greatly admired Yang (one of his early TV documentaries was a double-portrait of the Taiwanese masters Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien) and he has gradually acquired Yang's ability to combine left-brain analysis with right-brain sensitivity. He looks more and more like a master himself.

*I Wish* (the Japanese title *Kiseki* means 'Miracle') has two points of departure, one factual, one fictional. The factual one is the opening of the Shinkansen (Bullet Train) service from Hakata to Kagoshima in Kyushu, Japan's large western island. Most of the film is divided between two stops on this line, the northern city of Fukuoka and the southern terminus Kagoshima, the latter menaced by the proximity of the semi-active volcano Sakurajima; the climax takes place near the town of Kawashiri, the exact mid-point of the new line. The fictional one is a schism in the working-class Osaka family: the wife has left her feckless husband and moved to stay with her elderly parents in Kagoshima, together with her elder son, the 12-year-old Koichi, while the husband, who works as a labourer while trying to revive his career as an indie rocker, lives in Fukuoka with their younger son Ryunosuke (Ryu for short). The parents haven't spoken in months, but the boys call each other from school every day. Koichi wants more than anything to reunite the family, but Ryu dreads returning to the days of angry rows across the dinner table and rather likes the status quo, which includes having new friends and growing vegetables in the back garden.

Fact and fiction converge when Koichi gets it into his head that the first north- and south-bound trains to run on the new line will release magical energy when they pass each other at the mid-point – a magical energy which will make dreams come true. The core of the film is Koichi's gradual realisation that he's not at all sure what his dream is: he goes from longing for Sakurajima to erupt (so that the family will have to leave the "dump" of Kagoshima) to longing for his parents to come back together and ultimately to putting "the world" ahead of the family. Koichi remembers the good times (a family picnic in an Osaka theme park), while Ryu can't forget the bad times; the younger boy's doubts inflect and help to shape his elder brother's sense of their situation.

Like everything else in the film, this seems truthful, accurately observed and superbly acted. Koreeda has been attuned to the feelings of kids in difficult family circumstances since his feature debut *Maboroshi* (*Maborosi*, 1995), and his direction of all the children here (especially real-life brothers Maeda Koki and Maeda Oshiro) is almost uncannily empathetic. Koichi's reaction to his teacher's



Child's play: Maeda Koki

attempt to come on like a surrogate father is spot-on, and the way that Ryu acts his age when he's with his peers but treats his father like a wayward child is a particular comic joy.

Koreeda has learnt from Yang that no detail is unimportant, and *I Wish* finesses his skill in giving seemingly trivial, everyday moments and images a lasting resonance. When the Shinkansen trains finally pass each other and most of the kids shout out their wishes, Koreeda fills the screen with a montage of still-life images from earlier in the film (not necessarily recapitulating earlier shots), and it's a measure of his success that every one of them is not only instantly recognisable but also poignant or amusing in this new context. Another measure

would be his ability to marshal a large ensemble cast in concise scenes which appear almost random but are in fact precisely engineered to contribute to the bigger picture. Case in point: the interplay/parallels between the grandparents' activities – Grandma's 'expressive dance' classes, Grandpa's attempt to bake the kind of Karukan sponge cake he once enjoyed for his group of old codgers – and the children's play.

The film has the quality of a realist fable, underpinned by strong elements of social commentary. The adult stars, most returning from previous Koreeda movies, contribute expert character sketches which intensify the sociological dimension. But it's the insight into childhood experience which shines. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producers

Koike Kentaro  
Taguchi Hijiri

### Written by

Kore-Eda Hirokazu

### Director of

Photography

Yamazaki Yutaka

### Editor

Kore-Eda Hirokazu

### Art Director

Matsuo Ayako

### Music

Quruli

### Sound Editor

Tsurumaki Yutaka

### Costume Designer

Kobayashi Miwako

### ©"KISEKI"

Production

Committee

### Production

Companies

Shirogumi Inc.

In co-production

with Bigx

### Cast

Maeda Koki

Osako Koichi

### Maeda Oshiro

Kinami Ryunosuke

Hayashi Ryoga

Tasuku

Nagayoshi

Seinosuke

Makoto

Uchida Kyara

Megumi

Hashimoto Kanna

Kanna

Isobe Rento

Rento

Ohtsuka Nene

Osako Nozomi,

mother

Odagiri Joe

Kinami Kenji, father

Natsukawa Yui

Kyoko, Megumi's

mother

Nagasawa Masami

Ms Mimura, teacher

Abe Hiroshi

Mr Sakagami, teacher

Harada Yoshio

Wataru

Kiki Kirin

Osako Hideko,

grandmother

Hashizume Isao

Osako Shukichi,

grandfather

### DTS

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitled

### Distributor

Arrow Films

Japanese

theatrical title

Kiseki

Kyushu, Japan, 2010. Twelve-year-old Osako Koichi lives with his mother and maternal grandparents in Kagoshima, in the shadow of the rumbling volcano Sakurajima. Six months earlier, when his parents separated, Koichi's younger brother Ryunosuke (Ryu for short) opted to stay with their father in Fukuoka, partly to make sure that he didn't start dating any other woman. Koichi longs for the family to be reunited and often calls Ryu to discuss it; he hopes that Sakurajima will erupt so that they will be evacuated from Kagoshima. Suspecting that the moment when two trains pass in opposite directions releases magical forces, and knowing that the Kyushu Shinkansen line will soon open, Koichi conceives a plan to witness the first north- and south-bound Shinkansen trains passing on the new line; he intends to wish at that moment for the family to be reunited. Co-opting his classmates Tasuku and Makoto, he sets about rustling up the cash for return tickets to Kawashiri, where the trains will pass each other. Initially reluctant, Ryu finally agrees to come from Fukuoka to a rendezvous in Kawashiri; he brings along three friends. After an overnight stay with the grandparents of Megumi, one of Ryu's friends, the seven kids make it to the exact spot where the two trains pass. Afterwards, though, Koichi confesses to Ryu that he didn't make the wish... and Ryu admits that he wished for something else.



## Jack Reacher

USA 2012

Director: Christopher McQuarrie

Certificate 12A 130m 12s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

This adaptation of the ninth of Lee Child's novels about herculean avenger Jack Reacher casts the small-framed Tom Cruise and elevates the hero to title status – no doubt in the hope of securing a long-term action franchise for the no-longer-boyish superstar. Reacher was conceived as a contemporary incarnation of an outside-the-law hero such as Bulldog Drummond or the Saint, though he's also squarely in the vein of righteous 1970s vigilantes like Paul Kersey of *Death Wish*, Buford Pusser of *Walking Tall* or Dirty Harry.

One lesson hard learned during Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1980s action heyday is that it's a risk casting a hero who is as big or bigger than his opponents, since anyone who spends their screen career beating up littler guys comes off as a bully. Cruise works better as a screen Reacher than someone more in line with Child's description might have done. Retiring most of his trademarked grinning, cocky, air-punching mannerisms, Cruise – slightly channelling his professional killer from 2004's *Collateral*, albeit on the side of good – plays Reacher as compact and formal, issuing fair warning to disposable goons who think they have the drop on him. When his confidence at facing five heavies is questioned, he calmly explains that he'll only have to beat up three of them because the other two will be so impressed by his brutal treatment that they'll run off without taking their punishment. While working the case, he doesn't even flirt with the heroine – though Rosamund Pike's lawyer misreads the signals once, to her embarrassment – or play along when the honey-trap Sandy comes on to him in a bar.

Writer-director Christopher McQuarrie, best known still for writing *The Usual Suspects* (1995), is making only his second film as a director, in a far more mainstream arena than his debut, *The Way of the Gun* (2000). He does a solid, professional job – presenting many violent incidents within the boundaries of a US PG-13



Precision execution: Tom Cruise

rating (a two-second trim has secured the film a 12A from the BBFC), showcasing his star to his best advantage in every scene in which he appears, and conveying a by-no-means simplistic plot efficiently and clearly. If *Jack Reacher* doesn't build on its source material in same the way that John Boorman's *Point Blank* builds on Richard Stark's *The Hunter*, or Sam Peckinpah's *The Killer Elite* (evoked by Robert Duvall's welcome presence) does on its pulp origin, then there's a sense that it wasn't supposed to. This is a pro job, a machine-tooled franchise foundation rather than a crazy auteur exercise (which *The Way of the Gun* was), executed just as precisely as the opening massacre – a cool murder disguised as a spree-killing.

A lone lunatic element is Werner Herzog's performance as a European villain who once chewed off his own fingers in a Russian prison camp. Given the otherwise rather bland array of outclassed baddies – including the inevitable traitor among the law-enforcement community – Herzog, sporting a blue marble blind eye and a venomous accent, brings a much needed jolt of peculiarity into an otherwise straight-arrow entertainment. Ⓢ

## Jiro Dreams of Sushi

USA 2011

Director: David Gelb

### Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Surely not since the private fantasies of washed-up actor-cum-fish-fetishist Troy McClure in *The Simpsons* can images of glistening seafood have been lingered over as lovingly as they are in David Gelb's documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. The young director's debut film is a gentle, seductive and lightly hagiographic portrait that looks to position its subject's rigorous mastery of his profession as a classical artform.

The man behind the gastronomic beauty on show is the eponymous Jiro, an octogenarian chef who left home at the age of nine and has been busy making sushi ever since. A stoic, fiercely disciplined man with no interest in expanding his small family business, Jiro is a creature of ritual, and a truly intriguing individual whose conspicuous asceticism is offset by occasional flashes of sharp wit.

Jiro's implacable pursuit of excellence is viewed by Gelb (who wisely stays behind the camera) with something like awe – it's an approach that informs both the film's core strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, like Richard Press's tremendous recent documentary *Bill Cunningham New York* (about the elderly, similarly workaholic photographer), much of *Jiro's* success lies in its formal simplicity and clear understanding of its subject's all-consuming passion. Simply put, Gelb engages with what's important to Jiro, rather than editorialising on his own terms. However, the downside to this approach (further bolstered by a host of effusive contributions from various colleagues and food critics) is a pervasive sense of hero-worship which, though fully understandable, precludes a deeper look at Jiro's no doubt rich life.

Jiro's difficult upbringing (an alcoholic, abusive father is referenced) is sprinted through at breakneck speed, while his wife – glimpsed only fleetingly in a sepia photograph – is so absent from the narrative that one assumes she must have ascended to the great sushi restaurant in the sky. It comes as something of a pleasant surprise then to learn that she's still alive and well, even if that fact is only mentioned in a throwaway remark near the film's conclusion.

The film's core is provided by the complex relationship between Jiro and his eldest son, the 50-year-old Yoshikazu, a diffident fellow who's expected to assume Jiro's position when the latter retires or dies. As we can infer from Yoshikazu's permanently furrowed brow and the towering esteem in which his father is held ("When Jiro dies or retires, sushi may never reach that level again," comments one critic), he's under serious pressure. Much of the film's emotional kick stems from the sense that Yoshikazu might not truly believe in himself – until a final, subtly delivered twist suggests that he's more capable than we've hitherto suspected. The time spent with Yoshikazu on his daily trips to the fish market is intimate and something of a relief, spiriting us away from the rarefied strictures imposed on him (and, to an extent, us) by his taskmaster father.

Tying the film together is its aesthetic, which mirrors and accentuates the simplicity of Jiro's methodology and

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Tom Cruise  
Don Granger  
Paula Wagner  
Gary Levinsohn

#### Written for the screen by

Christopher McQuarrie  
Based on the book  
*One Shot* by Lee Child

#### Director of Photography

Caleb Deschanel

#### Editor

Kevin Stitt

#### Production Designer

Jim Bissell

#### Music by/Orchestra Conducted by

Joe Kraemer

#### Sound Mixer

Jay Meagher

#### Costume Designer

Susan Matheson

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

Paul Jennings

©Paramount Pictures Corporation

#### Production Companies

Paramount Pictures

and Skydance

Productions

present a Tom

Cruise production

#### Executive Producers

Jake Myers

Ken Kamins

Kevin Messick

David Ellison

Dana Goldberg

Paul Schwake

#### Film Extracts

*The Big Country*

(1958)

#### Cast

Tom Cruise

Jack Reacher

Rosamund Pike

Helen Rodin

Richard Jenkins

District Attorney

Alex Rodin

Werner Herzog

the Zec

David Oyelowo

Detective Emerson

Jai Courtney

Charlie

Joseph Sikora

James Barr

Robert Duvall

Martin Cash

Michael

Raymond-James

Linsky

Alexia Fast

Sandy

#### Dolby Digital/

Datasat Digital

#### Sound

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Paramount

Pictures UK

11,718 ft + 0 frames

(after cuts of 2s)

Pittsburgh, the present. Charlie, a sniper, shoots dead five people on a riverside walk. Planted evidence leads Detective Emerson to arrest Iraq veteran James Barr. Though he remains silent under interrogation, Barr writes "get Jack Reacher". District Attorney Alex Rodin intends to ask for the death penalty, but his lawyer daughter Helen takes the case for the defence. Barr is beaten by other prisoners and put into a coma. Jack Reacher, a former military policeman living 'off the grid', arrives. He once let Barr get away with murder because the victims were rapists, but swore to punish him if he killed again. Helen hires Reacher as an investigator. He deduces that four of the victims were murdered to make the assassination of the fifth – a woman who was refusing to sell her construction company to a criminal organisation – seem random. A young woman named Sandy approaches Reacher in a bar to lure him into an unfair fight. He uses his skills to see off five thugs, then traces them in an attempt to find out who is behind the conspiracy. He tells Helen that either her father or Emerson is in the pay of the criminals – it turns out to be Emerson, who kidnaps Helen so that Charlie and his immediate boss, a European known as 'the Zec' ('the prisoner'), can lure Reacher into a trap. With the help of Cash, a veteran who runs the rifle range where Barr practised, Reacher rescues Helen and kills the villains.



**Tuna tuner: Ono Jiro**

environment. Shooting with the RED digital camera, Gelb displays an uncanny spatial awareness, while copious lip-smacking shots of sushi preparation are scored by sweepingly elegant musical choices (Philip Glass, Tchaikovsky) which add garnish to the film's reverent, classical flavour.

However, the film's most stunning moment happens outside the restaurant, at a tuna auction where the noisy exchanges between buyers and sellers are matched with an escalating, percussive soundtrack and captured by fluid, balletic Steadicam work. The sequence has a thrillingly ritualistic quality, animating the local food community and making a dance of the economic food chain that ultimately leads to the grateful mouths of Jiro's customers. It's a slice of escapist fun in an enjoyable film about the hard-earned pleasures of tireless graft. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Kevin Iwashina  
Tom Pellegrini  
David Gelb  
**Cinematography**  
David Gelb  
**Edited by**  
Brandon Driscoll-Luttringer  
**Re-recording  
Mixer/Dialogue  
Editor**  
Tim Hoogenakker

**@Sushi Movie, LLC  
Production  
Companies**  
A Fortissimofilms  
presentation  
City Room Media  
presents a Weaver/  
Pellegrini, Preferred  
Content production  
in association with  
Sundial Pictures  
**Executive  
Producers**  
Matthew Weaver

Chris Kelly  
Jennifer Carrico  
Stefan Nowicki  
Joey Carey

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

A documentary about 85-year-old Ono Jiro, considered by many to be the world's best sushi chef. He is the owner of the Sukiyabashi Jiro sushi restaurant, which is located in a Tokyo subway station and seats a maximum of ten customers at any given time. The first restaurant of its kind to be awarded three Michelin stars, it attracts customers from around the world, who must book months in advance.

The film focuses on Jiro's working methods and his relationship with eldest son Yoshikazu, who works for Jiro and who will one day take over the restaurant. The film also briefly profiles Jiro's younger son Takashi, who left to open a new restaurant in a nearby district.

## The Liability

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Craig Viveiros

**Reviewed by Ashley Clark**

**Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist**

With its unashamedly pulpy brew of chatty criminals, casually explicit violence and a fetishised femme fatale, Craig Viveiros's snappy, low-budget comedy-thriller wears its influences (early '90s Tarantino, most egregiously) on its sleeve.

As in Viveiros's prison drama *Ghosted* (2011), masculinity – and how it is filtered through criminality – is the key theme here. At the film's centre is the developing relationship between 19-year-old Adam, the amiably gormless 'liability' of the title (played nicely by Jack O'Connell), and Roy (Tim Roth), a laconic, Cuban-music-loving hitman who just wants to get out of the game and attend his daughter's wedding. Viveiros extracts some mildly hair-raising comic mileage from the pair's chalk-and-cheese badinage and haplessly violent attempts to stick to the 'plan' – Roy's final hit – all the while acknowledging that underneath the banter lies a genuine craving for acceptance in Adam. After a few minutes in the company of his mother's monstrous boyfriend Peter (Peter Mullan), we know why this gauche young hoodie might well be in the market for a surrogate father. Appearing only briefly, Mullan has a field day as the venal suburban sex-trafficker clad in chinos and slippers, breathing some genuine menace into a film whose default tone is one of ironic detachment.

John Wrathall's witty, oedipally inflected script delivers a host of unexpected, effective twists, even if the implausibilities begin to stack up a little too highly towards the end. The elliptical darkness of the plot is augmented by the landscapes, with Viveiros mining much tension from Adam and Roy's journey north (the film was shot primarily in Northumberland). Both of them are clearly ill at ease in such surroundings, and there's an aura of mystery emanating from the wide-open locations and billowing factory smoke. Though the perma-



**One last job: Tim Roth**

murky *The Liability* lacks the disturbing cognitive dissonance evinced by the studied contrast between the beauty of the landscapes and the terror of the action in Ben Wheatley's recent *Sightseers*, it's still refreshing to see such environs exploited, especially in the context of that lesser-spotted genre piece, the British road movie.

Intriguingly, the real criminal mastermind amid all the male angst is Talulah Riley's ghostly, beautiful avenging angel, who has a slightly dodgy Latvian accent and a propensity for popping up just at the right moment. Even though her role is sadly underwritten, her presence underscores the hubris of the male characters; compared with her implacable, measured quest for justice at any price, they *all* look like liabilities.

Held back from any real emotional resonance by its glib attitude to violence, and hemmed in by its clear debts to superior genre fare, *The Liability* is unlikely to linger long in the mind, but it's well acted and eminently watchable for the duration of its running time. Finally, fans of Roth will spot that his Roy is a neat inversion of his role as hot-headed hitman's apprentice Myron in Stephen Frears's 1984 thriller *The Hit*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Richard Johns  
Rupert Jermyn  
**Written by**  
John Wrathall  
**Director of  
Photography**  
James Friend  
**Editor**  
Pia Di Ciaula  
**Production Designer**  
Matthew Gant

**Original Music**  
Vicky Wijeratne  
**Production  
Sound Mixer**  
Stuart Wright  
**Costume Designer**  
Alison McLaughlin

**@The Liability  
Film Limited  
Production  
Companies**

Corona Pictures  
presents in  
association with  
AV Pictures,  
Starchild Pictures  
& Met Film Post  
**Executive Producers**  
Clare Christie  
John Crocker  
Toby Jermyn  
Jeremy Middleton  
Nicholas Moore

Angad Paul  
Victor Bateman  
Lee Brazier  
Chris Hainsworth  
Sean Kelly  
Ed King  
Martin Gentles  
Carlo Dusi  
Tim Roth

**Cast**  
**Tim Roth**  
Roy  
**Jack O'Connell**  
Adam  
**Talulah Riley**  
the girl  
**Kierston Wareing**  
Nicky  
**Peter Mullan**  
Peter

**Dolby Digital  
In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Revolver  
Entertainment

England, the present. Hapless 19-year-old Adam crashes a Mercedes belonging to his mother's boyfriend Peter. Following a confrontation at Peter's house, Adam finds footage on Peter's laptop of a girl being abused; he closes the laptop before Peter sees. Peter tells Adam that he can make up for the damage to the car by doing a driving job for colleague Roy, a hitman due to carry out his final hit before retirement.

Adam drives Roy to the north-east coast. On the way, Roy instructs Adam to throw away his mobile phone, but Adam secretly hides it in the car. Roy and Adam kill their target, and hack off his hands to make the murder resemble one of a spate of killings that have occurred in the area. They are spotted by a passing backpacker, 'the girl', who escapes in their car with the bag containing the hands. Roy and Adam steal a van. Adam confesses his

failure to dispense with the phone – which is still in the car the girl stole. Roy calls and arranges to meet the girl to exchange the bag for cash. The exchange is made.

Roy attempts to kill Adam but is knocked over by a car driven by the girl. Adam awakes, tied up in a pumping station. The girl, who is Latvian, reveals that the murdered man was a sex-trafficker (and her last connection to her sister – the girl on Peter's laptop). Adam realises she is the serial killer. Roy arrives and is attacked by the girl, who soon disappears. Roy confirms that sex-trafficker Peter, realising what Adam had seen on his laptop, wanted Adam killed. The pair, who have developed a bond, call a truce.

Adam drops Roy at the church where his daughter is to be married. Adam goes to Peter's house, where they fight. The girl appears and shoots Peter dead.



# A Liar's Autobiography The Untrue Story of Monty Python's Graham Chapman

United Kingdom 2012, Director: Bill Jones, Jeff Simpson, Ben Timlett, Certificate 15 84m 47s

## Reviewed by Thomas Dawson

Who is the most significant author in *A Liar's Autobiography*? Three directors are credited – Bill Jones and Ben Timlett (who directed and produced the six-part TV documentary series *Monty Python: Almost the Truth – The Lawyer's Cut*) and Jeff Simpson, while the film itself is based on the late Graham Chapman's fake 1980 memoir *A Liar's Autobiography*, which boasted five authors (one of whom didn't even exist). Helping to construct this cinematic patchwork are 14 different animation studios, working in diverse 3D styles, plus audio recordings of Chapman himself and the voices of the surviving members of the Monty Python troupe, who play various characters in the sketches within the film.

Terry Gilliam's 1970s stop-motion animations were, of course, integral to the surreal dimensions of the Python humour. To what extent, though, does the decision by the creators of *A Liar's Autobiography* to use multiple animators pay dividends here? There's a crudity to many of these stereoscopic images: see, for example, the physical unattractiveness – all bowling-ball faces and bulbous noses – of Chapman's lower-middle-class parents, who, shockingly for their intellectually precocious son, aren't familiar with Robert Graves's *I, Claudius* in the 'Scarborough and Teen Sex' sequence, or the giant 'cock car' which symbolises his same-sex appetites in a subsequent chapter. A generous interpretation might be that the filmmakers adopted their disjointed approach to convey the impossibility of depicting the

'real' Chapman in under 90 minutes, yet one might have expected a less predictably illustrative approach to their creative choices.

The medically qualified Chapman, who took the 'straight man' leading roles in the Monty Python feature films *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) and *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), describes himself as a "raging poof", albeit one who likes rugby, mountaineering and smoking a gentleman's pipe. Timidly, however, the film sidesteps his role as spokesperson for gay rights in the 1970s, a time when few popular entertainers had the courage to come out publicly.

Nor are we much the wiser as to why Chapman, unlike his fellow Pythons, struggled to find professional success following the break-up of the group. There are segments devoted to his addiction to alcohol and his self-administered cold-turkey treatment, and to his celebrity partying in Los Angeles, where he relocated as a tax exile in the late 1970s. The Cambridge-educated Chapman, whose comic persona in the Pythons was built around his mocking of authority figures, emerges as surprisingly hostile to any theoretical approach to interpreting his own internal life. It's a defensive position that's shared by this film, which includes the subject's diatribe about the folly of anyone drawing connections between childhood experiences and adult behaviour ("They can ferret for their filth in other people's autobiographies," he gloats), and which also elects to have Cameron Diaz voicing a cartoonishly drawn Seigmund (sic) Freud. **S**

## Lincoln

USA/India 2012  
Director: Steven Spielberg  
Certificate 12A 150m 16s

See Feature  
on page 50

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The wheedling conversational style of America's 16th president as described in Doris Kearns Goodwin's book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* – dramatised here by Tony Kushner's screenplay (which also draws from many other books) and embodied by Daniel Day-Lewis – could be described as 'roundabout'. A great fan of prairie comedians, Old Abe liked to lead into business with a seemingly random yarn, as though to cut the tension, while sneaking in his point through the funny business.

The opening scene of Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* has the president informally addressing Union soldiers in a smoke-blown encampment – the fog of war or the swirling mists of legend? Happily, in the main *Lincoln* takes an appropriately roundabout approach, finding Lincoln's essence in the apogee of his final months, concerned principally with the backroom dealing behind the passage of the 13th Amendment.

Day-Lewis's Lincoln cuts a solitary, often retiring figure, as though hiding out to escape being fitted with a halo; as the votes are tallied for the Amendment's passage in the House of Representatives and John Williams's orchestral treacle overflows, Lincoln is off playing with young son Tad, obscured in the White House drapery. And when Lincoln is felled by the assassin's bullet, we are not shown the famous *Sic semper tyrannis* scene at Ford's Theatre, but instead watch Tad receiving the news from the stage manager at Grover's Theatre, where he is watching *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*.

It is no mean feat to create surprise and suspense, as this scene does, around history's foregone conclusions. In large part, *Lincoln* manages this by dramatising the relationship between speech and thought, thought and deed. It is a movie of minds being made up, so dependent on oratorical manoeuvring that there often seems little for Spielberg to do by way of signature 'cinematic' touches other than, with DP Janusz Kaminski, to pour shafts of backlighting sunbeams through windows into underlit rooms.

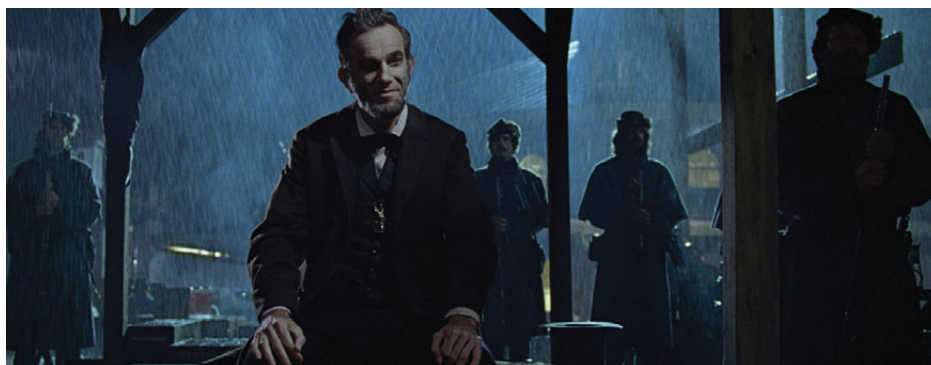
Unlike, say, the overpraised Aaron Sorkin, whose talkers tend to speak in a single hectic voice, Kushner has created a particular declamatory personality for each of his true-life characters. Making the rare attempt to approximate the reported nasal tenor of the historical Lincoln, Day-Lewis adopts a high, hoarse delivery that breaks into a nanny-goat bray on the rare occasions he allows himself to lose his temper in public. I say "in public", for *Lincoln* contains emotionally violent domestic scenes with First Lady Mary Todd (Sally Field) that reveal a private hell from which Lincoln's public life seems almost a respite. There is a sense of ever-present self-regulation in this Lincoln, whose genial, colloquial, general-store manner disguises the shrewdness of a horse-flesh peddler. If he rarely directly reveals his intended purpose in his meandering approach – his cabinet members express exasperation at his failure to come quickly to a point – there's no doubt that he knows a hawk from a handsaw. An early scene with some

## Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Bill Jones Ben Timlett <b>Written by</b> Graham Chapman <b>Original Music</b> John Greswell Christopher Taylor <b>Sound Design</b> André Jacquemin <b>Animation Producer</b> Justin Weyers <b>Animation</b> <i>Oscar Wilde</i> Not to Scale Director: Chris Ketchell  <i>Polish Airman</i> Peepshow <i>Eton</i> Steven Lall Animation Director: Steven Lall  <i>Scarborough/Fish Shop/Teen Sex List</i>	<b>Superfud</b> Director: Sean Dougherty  <i>Biggles</i> Made Visual Studio Director: Justin Weyers  <i>Freud/Cambridge</i> Sherbet Director: Joe Pelling  <i>Monkeys</i> Mr. & Mrs Smith Directors: Lee Danger Coope, Ashley Pay  <i>St Swithin's</i> Cake <i>Frost &amp; Ibiza</i> Trunk Animation Directors: Alasdair Brotherston, Jock Mooney, Layla Atkinson, Rok Predin	<i>Drying Out/Monopoly</i> Arthur Cox Director: George Sander-Jackson  <i>Stewardess/Coming Out Party/Pissed in LA</i> Arthur Cox Director: Matthew Walker  <i>LA Parties</i> Beakus Animation Director: Matthias Hoegg  <i>Epistle</i> Beakus Animation Director: Daniel Chester  <i>Sit on My Face</i> A for Animation Director: Jane E Davies	<i>Nightmare Tundra*</i> <i>Vomit/Space Pods</i> Treat Studios Director: Matt Layzell  <b>Production Companies</b> Brainstorm Media and EPIX present with Trinity Films a Bill & Ben production <b>Executive Producers</b> Mark Sandell Meyer Schwarzstein Mark Greenberg Douglas A. Lee  <b>Voice Cast</b> <b>Graham Chapman</b> narrated by/himself <b>John Cleese</b> himself/exploding don/David Frost <b>Terry Gilliam</b> interview don 2/Dr	<b>One Across/pilot/Tundra*</b> <b>Terry Jones</b> himself/mother/Biggles/anatomy don/Enormous Peter <b>Michael Palin</b> himself/father/interview don 1/Hibbern/Queen Mother <b>Carol Cleveland</b> masseuse/singing telegram/stewardess <b>Cameron Diaz</b> Seigmund Freud <b>Philip Bulcock</b> David Sherlock <b>Stephen Fry</b> <b>Rob Buckman</b> <b>Jamileisa Jacquemin</b> <b>Diana Kent</b> <b>Lloyd Kaufman</b> <b>Tom Hollander</b>  <b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]	<b>Some screenings presented in 3D</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Trinity Filmed Entertainment  <b>7,630 ft +8 frames</b>
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An animated 'biography' of Graham Chapman, the English comedian and Monty Python member who died of throat cancer in October 1989 aged 48. Drawing on audio recordings of Chapman, digitally animated sequences voiced by the surviving Monty Python members and archival TV and film footage, it presents a version of Chapman's life, incorporating fantastical interludes and revisiting his Midlands childhood and his medical studies at Cambridge University, where he joined the Footlights drama club at the same time as John Cleese. Turning his back on medicine, Chapman begins writing for satirical TV shows such as 'The Frost Report', then in 1969 forms the comic troupe 'Monty Python's Flying Circus'

with fellow British comedians Cleese, Michael Palin, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and the American animator Terry Gilliam. As well as writing and starring in the 'Monty Python' television series and performing in the group's concerts in the UK and the US, Chapman took the lead role in two feature films, 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail' (1975) and 'Monty Python's Life of Brian' (1979). Living in the late 1970s as a tax exile in Los Angeles with his long-term partner David Sherlock, Chapman successfully gives up alcohol. The film ends at Chapman's memorial service at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, with Cleese praising his late friend by amending the famous Monty Python 'Dead Parrot' sketch.



Voice of America: Daniel Day-Lewis

← rural petitioners reveals both Lincoln's common touch and his capacity for quickly sizing up whatever person he is speaking to, finding the right tone to strike. In some of the film's most compelling moments, you even see him talking *himself* around to an idea.

In the molasses slick of Lincoln's slow speech, the rash, plainspoken men whom he must corral become bogged down in unfamiliar contemplation. As the most formidable of these, Radical Republican leader Thaddeus Stevens, Tommy Lee Jones is on fine form, an ink-black wig sitting askance on his big, pocked head, very funny when he's seizing the opportunity to pummel a helplessly stammering Democrat Rep or trenchantly wielding invective like a scourge – "Fatuous nincompoop" and "Pettifoggling Tammany Hall hucksters" are among his effusions. (Lincoln's convincing Stevens to *hold* his tongue is one of the film's major plot points.)

Aficionados of the period will take a particular relish in seeing the whole wartime portrait gallery made flesh, including Lee Pace as Copperhead firebrand Fernando Wood in a Congress fairly swimming with excellent character actors, or Jackie Earle Haley (too short) as the semi-invalidated Confederate vice

president Alexander H. Stephens, whose delegation's progress towards the Hampton Roads Conference is one of the breaks from the stifling containment of chamber drama. The other parallel narrative follows lobbyist W.N. Bilbo (James Spader, excellent as fatted, scuttling Washington vermin), employed by Secretary of State William Seward (David Strathairn) to seduce corruptible lame-duck Dems.

If Lincoln's personality was defined by an easy traffic between the homely and the high-flown, *Lincoln* does not always handle the transition so well. Appropriately for a film about herding divergent personalities towards a greater good, it sometimes shows the conflicting pull of collaborative authorship – or perhaps of populist art? How could the same person responsible for the ingenious flanking manoeuvre of the assassination scene have vetted the hagiographic parting glance that black White House staffer William Slade (Stephen Henderson) casts after the noble silhouette of the Great Emancipator, marching into the annals of history? Finally, perhaps inevitably, *Lincoln* calcifies into a monument – but this shouldn't overshadow the accomplishment of keeping him flesh and blood for so long. ☺

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Steven Spielberg  
Kathleen Kennedy  
**Screenplay**  
Tony Kushner  
Based in part on the book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by Doris Kearns Goodwin  
**Director of Photography**  
Janusz Kaminski  
**Edited by**  
Michael Kahn  
**Production Designer**  
Rick Carter

**Music**  
John Williams  
**Sound Design**  
Ben Burtt  
**Costume Designer**  
Joanna Johnston

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**Production Companies**  
Twentieth Century Fox, DreamWorks

Pictures and Reliance Entertainment present in association with Participant Media and Dune Entertainment  
An Amblin Entertainment / Kennedy/Marshall Company production  
A Steven Spielberg film  
**Executive Producers**  
Daniel Lupi  
Jeff Skoll  
Jonathan King

**Cast**  
**Daniel Day-Lewis**  
Abraham Lincoln  
**Sally Field**  
Mary Todd Lincoln, 'Molly'  
**David Strathairn**  
William Seward  
**Joseph Gordon-Levitt**  
Robert Lincoln  
**James Spader**  
W.N. Bilbo  
**Hal Holbrook**  
Francis Preston Blair  
**Tommy Lee Jones**  
Thaddeus Stevens  
**John Hawkes**

Robert Latham  
**Jackie Earle Haley**  
Alexander H. Stephens  
**Bruce McGill**  
Edwin M. Stanton  
**Tim Blake Nelson**  
Richard Schell  
**Joseph Cross**  
John Hay  
**Jared Harris**  
Ulysses S. Grant  
**Lee Pace**  
Fernando Wood  
**Gloria Reuben**  
Elizabeth Keckley  
**Stephen McKinley Henderson**

William Slade  
**Gulliver McGrath**  
Tad Lincoln

**Dolby Digital/DTS/SDDS**  
**In Colour**  
**Prints by**  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox International (UK)

13,524 ft +0 frames

Washington DC and its environs, January 1865. With the end of the Civil War in sight, President Abraham Lincoln proposes that the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, should again be put before the House of Representatives, where it failed to pass almost a year previously. Lincoln is anxious to pass the Amendment before the end of war, when his earlier Emancipation Proclamation may be swept away by the courts. In order to facilitate its passage, Lincoln persuades abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens to temper his rhetoric on the floor. Francis Preston Blair, Republican Party founder and leader of its

conservative wing, offers support if Lincoln will listen to overtures of peace from the Confederacy. Finally, Secretary of State William Seward arranges for the coercion of lame-duck Democrats with the promise of jobs in the new administration. Meanwhile Lincoln faces strife at home, as eldest son Robert begs to join the war and wife Mary battles with melancholia. The Amendment narrowly passes. The Confederates surrender.

On 14 April Lincoln goes to the theatre, where he is assassinated. He returns as a spectre to deliver his second inaugural address.

## May I Kill U?

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Stuart Urban  
Certificate 15 87m 24s

### Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópidio

Warhol's 15 minutes of fame are given a twisted spin in Stuart Urban's *May I Kill U?*, in which a head injury turns bicycle-patrol policeman Baz (Kevin Bishop) into a polite vigilante who makes a point of asking his victims (repeat offenders only) for permission to kill them. His acts – which he films and then anonymously uploads on to the internet – transform him into an online hero.

*Judge Dredd*, *Taxi Driver* and any superheroes imparting their own version of justice are the obvious inspiration for this low-budget black-comedy thriller, a deadpan critique of omnipresent social networks and celebrity culture. Making good use of the 2011 London riots, *May I Kill U?* crosshatches comedy, thriller elements and positively gory sequences, and includes what is possibly cinema's first death by plasma TV.

Yet the film's most notable shortcoming is also its most ambitious feature – a playful, *Memento*-style backwards narrative which has Baz ping-pong from present to past like a pinball, although the overall impression is more clunky carousel than clockwork orange. ☹

Death becomes her:  
Frances Barber



### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Stuart Urban  
Alan Jay  
**Written by**  
Stuart Urban  
**Cinematographer**  
Fernando Ruiz  
**Editors**  
Fernando Ruiz  
Christopher Chow  
**Production Designer**  
Sabina Sattar  
**Music**  
**Composed by**  
Frank Iffman  
**Production**  
**Sound Mixer**  
Ludovic Lasserre  
**Costume Designer**  
Cathy Lang

**Production Companies**  
Vectis Vision  
presents a Cyclops  
Vision production of  
a Stuart Urban film  
**Executive Producers**  
Gary Phillips  
Mark Vennis

**Cast**  
**Kevin Bishop**  
Baz Vartis  
**Jack Doolan**  
Seth  
**Frances Barber**  
Bernice  
**Hayley-Marie Axe**  
Val Stone  
**Kasia Koleczek**  
Maya

**Rosemary Leach**  
Mags  
**Tyson Oba**  
Clark  
**Victor Konstantine**  
Boris  
**Ali Craig**  
Andy

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Miracle  
Communications

7,866 ft +0 frames

London, 2011. Policeman Baz is assaulted. He detains his attacker, who says he'd rather die than go to prison. Baz kills him, filming the murder and then uploading the footage on to the internet. Baz becomes a web hero and starts killing criminals who, when asked, say that they prefer death to prison. An elderly lady asks Baz to mercy-kill her, but she dies of natural causes and Baz inherits her house. Baz, his girlfriend Maya and his mother move in. The old lady's nephew, Seth, suspects Baz of killing his aunt, and takes him and Maya prisoner in the house. Earlier, Baz had discovered that his mother had been a prostitute and strangled her. Baz manages to call the police and frames Seth for all his own killings. Seth goes to prison and assumes Baz's online hero personality and celebrity.



# Midnight Son

USA 2010

Director: Scott Leberecht

Certificate: not submitted 88m

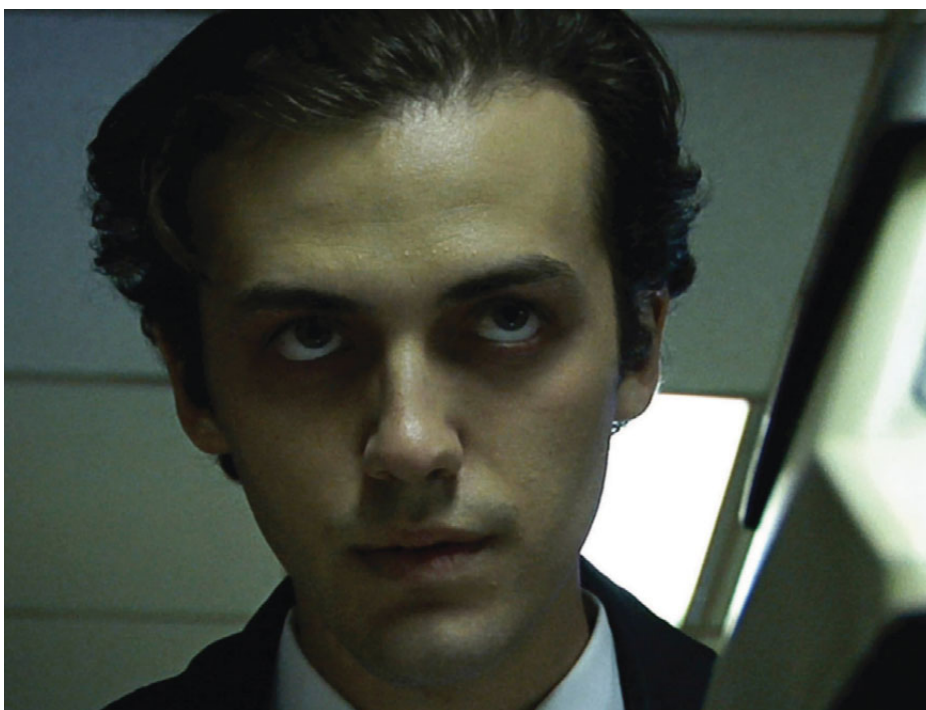
## Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

You might feel that the vampire genre has been done – pardon the pun – to death. Early cinema – brief years after the *fin-de-siècle* sensation of Bram Stoker's peculiar novel – took the idea of the predatory bloodsucker with the utmost seriousness, but the expressionist horror of F.W. Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu* was soon tidied up and commercialised by Hollywood, while any real attempt at terror was diluted by post-war Hammer camp. Nevertheless, a primal blood-fear lingers in our collective consciousness, no matter how we try to laugh it off, rationalise it or make it sexy. Still, with the final instalment of the *Twilight* saga safely nailed into its teen-fantasy coffin, we can at least bury the pop-gothic iteration, for a while anyway. And if Tomas Alfredson's 2008 *Let the Right One In* remains this generation's landmark attempt to reanimate the old bloodsucking narrative, Scott Leberecht has also managed to give his photophobic tale an unsettling, lo-fi identity of its own.

His skinny blood-addict certainly makes an unlikely Dracula: far from being a mysterious foreign aristocrat, Jacob (Zak Kilberg) is a reclusive L.A. loser in a dead-end job who has had to tailor his life around a skin condition which means that he catches fire if exposed to the sun. With no friends or family, he spends his nights working as a security guard and the rest of the time throws himself into creating a series of rich, vivid pictures of sunsets and radiant solar orbs – sublimating his desire for the very thing he can never look at in real life. As the film unfolds, he finds himself confronting two more increasingly urgent cravings: a tormenting physical hunger that can't be satisfied no matter how many microwave pizzas he wolfs down, and a yearning for a normal relationship with Mary (Maya Parish), the sweet and equally lonely girl he's met outside a bar.

Naturally, we already know what Jacob must discover through a series of painful realisations: it's human blood he needs, and if he's not careful Mary will become his unwilling donor. Jacob's desperate attempts to deny his identity as a vampire – and, when that fails, to work around it by seeking out legal, or at least non-lethal, sources of plasma – make up the film's central quest. By focusing on Jacob as a well-meaning kid who only wants to be normal, writer-director Leberecht manages to create real suspense within the dramatic irony of our foreknowledge of his inevitable fate. In fact, the audience's intimate familiarity with Jacob's predicament feeds the stifling claustrophobia of the piece; Leberecht locks us into a series of unrelenting tight close-ups which deny any comfort from perspective or any breathing space in which to escape from Jacob's growing fear and self-disgust.

And there's another emotion that grows out of his rapidly accelerating vampirism – the emotion most alien to this mild-mannered painter of sunsets. Jacob must deal with the fact that human blood gives him immense strength and power, and the temptation to use it is always lurking under the surface. Hence, his nemesis is not a morally upright Van Helsing character, a muscular scholar



Children of the bite: Zak Kilberg

wielding ancient lore about garlic, mirrors and crosses – it's a corrupt hospital orderly, Marcus (Jo D. Jonz), with a sideline in backdoor dealing. For a fee, he'll supply Jacob with IV drip-bags full of the red stuff, no questions asked, but he's soon pushing the addicted Jacob around and proves willing to improvise at gunpoint if need be. The film's denouement, and Jacob's survival, will depend on how he resolves this power struggle with his malevolent alter ego.

Jonz brings real relish to his role as he takes Marcus from flinty pragmatism to the outer reaches of psychotic survivalism, but it's up to Kilberg and Parish, also both relative newcomers, to carry the moral freight of the film. Looking at times like a very young, very emaciated Jude Law, Kilberg nicely nails Jacob's conflicted sense

of self; accessing horror, curiosity and desire in equal measure, he wrings every possible nuance from a frequently confused character who finds himself playing out an existential melodrama in the most banal setting imaginable. Parish has less to work with but still manages to flesh out Mary's loneliness and neediness – vital if we're going to accept this peculiar love story. Because Jacob and Mary's wild stab at a relationship is perhaps the real point of this particular take on the vampire myth. Others have chosen to make Dracula a seducer, or framed his condition as a medical horror of contagion or a morality tale about social degeneracy. No such grand themes here. It's simple desire – hunger, addiction and the vulnerability they imply – that really frightens Jacob in the end. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Matt Compton  
Scott Leberecht  
**Written by**  
Scott Leberecht  
**Director of Photography**  
Lyn Moncrief  
**Edited by**  
Scott Leberecht  
Ian McCarney

**Production Designer**  
Manuel Pérez Peña  
**Music**  
Kays Alatrakchi  
**Supervising Sound Editor**  
David C. Hughes  
**Costume Designer**  
Mairi Chisholm  
©Midday Moon, LLC

**Production Companies**  
Midday Moon, LLC presents in association with Free Lunch Productions  
**Executive Producers**  
Kevin McCorkle  
Lisa Campbell  
Max Curry  
Maya Parish

Eduardo Sanchez  
Reed Frerichs  
**Film Extracts**  
*Fright Night* (1985)

**Cast**  
Zak Kilberg  
Jacob  
Maya Parish  
Mary

Jo D. Jonz  
Marcus  
Arlen Escarpeta  
Russell  
Larry Cedar  
Ginslegh  
Juanita Jennings  
Liz  
Tracey Walter  
janitor

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
**Distributor**  
Monster Pictures

Not submitted for theatrical classification  
Video certificate: 18  
Running time: 88m 5s

Los Angeles, present day. Jacob is a loner, working nights as a security guard and spending his spare time in his basement flat painting pictures of the sun. A skin condition means that he can't be in sunlight; he's sickly and, though he eats constantly, he's always ravenously hungry. A doctor suggests that he has anaemia, and Jacob finds that drinking blood from the butcher's does him good. Downing it by the cupful, he feels strong enough to venture out to a bar, where he meets equally lonely coke addict Mary. They strike up a relationship, but when Mary's coke-induced nosebleed gives Jacob his first taste of human blood, he is transformed – and hooked.

Attempting to protect Mary from his blood-hunger, and intrigued by her suggestion that he could make a career as an artist, Jacob finds a hospital orderly, Marcus, who will sell him waste blood. But Jacob starts to suspect that he's killed someone during a recent blackout. A local policeman won't accept his garbled confession, but Jacob's increasing strength leads to a confrontation with Marcus in which both the blood-dealer and Mary become infected. Jacob manages to kill Marcus but returns home to find Mary in a frenzy of hunger. At this moment the detective knocks on the door; they kill him for his blood, their horror mingling with satisfaction.

# Les Misérables

USA/United Kingdom/Japan 2012

Director: Tom Hooper

Certificate 12A 157m 49s

## Reviewed by Anton Bitel

*Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo's historical novel of revolution and redemption, first published in 1862, has proven irresistible to filmmakers. As far back as 1897, the Lumière brothers shot a quick-change artist's character impersonations in *Victor Hugo et les principaux personnages des Misérables*, while Albert Cappelani's *Le Chemineau* (1906) and Alice Guy-Blaché's *L'Enfant de la barricade* (1907) were early examples of dramatised scenes inspired by the novel. There would follow countless fuller film (and television) adaptations, but in 1985 Hugo's story would achieve its most popular form in the stage musical produced by Cameron Mackintosh. Now in its 28th year, it is the world's longest-running musical and has been seen by more than 60 million people in 42 countries and 21 languages.

There is no need to ask why this new big-screen musical version of *Les Misérables* has come into existence. Recent box-office successes like *Chicago* (2002), *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), *Dreamgirls* (2006), *Hairspray* (2007), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) and *Mamma Mia!* (2008) show there's still money to be made, and even the odd award to be won, in film adaptations of stage musicals – and *Les Misérables* comes with a massive ready-made audience that not only knows the story but can hum the tunes, even if the stage production's original composer (Claude-Michel Schönberg) and French and English lyricists (Alain Boublil and Herbert Kretzmer) have collaborated with screenwriter William Nicholson (*Gladiator*, *Shadowlands*) to rewrite and rearrange some of their old numbers and add new material. The more pertinent question – why now? – is best answered with reference to our own era of economic inequities and Occupy movements, bringing renewed relevance to Hugo's themes of resistance and change.

Yet here popular uprisings are dressed in failure. "There was a time we killed the king," sings the urchin Gavroche (Daniel Huttleston) of the previous century's French Revolution. "Now we have got another king – he's no better than the last." The 1832 June Rebellion depicted in the film fails to inspire the masses and ends in a massacre, while even the 1848 Revolution portrayed triumphantly in the dreamy closing sequence would have its achievements reversed within a few years as republic again gave way to empire. Flush with love for Cosette (Amanda Seyfried), Marius (Eddie Redmayne) is mocked for his petty preoccupations in a time of national crisis, with his fellow student Enjolras (Aaron Tveit) declaring contemptuously: "You talk of battle, lost and won, and here he comes like Don Juan – it is like an opera." Of course, full to the brim with sung-through love triangles, deathbed confessions and high melodrama, *Les Misérables* is just like an opera, and favours the personal over the political, tracing the internal revolution of its ex-con protagonist Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman) from hate to love.

Director Tom Hooper (*The King's Speech*) seems from the outset to be exploiting cinema's unique capacity for grand spectacle, opening with an epic sequence of a chain gang hauling a gigantic ship to shore; but for all this film's recreation



Revolutionary road: Aaron Tveit, Eddie Redmayne

of sometimes vast period sets, Hooper's trump card is in fact his use of prolonged close-ups, bringing viewers to the performers' inner torments with a proximity that is more intimate and unflinching than anything achievable on stage. The effect is only enhanced by Hooper's decision to film his cast singing 'live' to camera, without any lip-synching to pre-recorded tracks, so that Anne Hathaway, for example, is able to deliver 'I Dreamed a Dream', the despairing solo of fallen *grisette* Fantine, with a raw dramatic intensity rarely seen in musicals, while Jackman and Russell Crowe (as Valjean's implacable pursuer Inspector Javert) get to exhibit the acting skills for which they are famous alongside their lesser-known singing chops.

Still, those not already enamoured of stage musicals are unlikely to be converted by over two and a half hours of mannered song and recitative, wherein emotions are writ large in long lyrical outpourings rather than in the subtle gestures and prosaic dialogue that tend to define cinematic realism. For these viewers, scenes of characters having their teeth pulled or wading through shit may well seem a reflexive metaphor for the experience of enduring so much alienating stylisation – and while it may come as some relief that the singing is not also accompanied by dancing, one sequence in which Cosette is joined by a fluttering butterfly may prove too kitschily Disney even for the most diehard musical fans. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Debra Hayward  
Cameron Mackintosh

### Screenplay

William Nicholson  
Alain Boublil  
Claude-Michel Schönberg

Herbert Kretzmer

Based on the original

stage musical Boublil

and Schönberg's *Les*

*Misérables* from the

novel by Victor Hugo

### Director of

Photography  
Danny Cohen

### Editors

Melanie Ann Oliver  
Chris Dickens

### Production Designer

Eve Stewart

### Music

Claude-Michel

Schönberg

### Lyrics

Herbert Kretzmer

### Production

Sound Mixer  
Simon Hayes

### Costume Designer

Paco Delgado  
Choreographer  
Liam Steel

### @Universal Studios

### Production

### Companies

A Universal Pictures

presentation in

association with

Relativity Media

A Working Title Films/

Cameron Mackintosh

production

A film by Tom Hooper

### Presented in

association with  
Dentsu, Inc.

### Executive Producers

Angela Morrison  
Liza Chasin  
Nicholas Allott

F. Richard Pappas

### Cast

Hugh Jackman

Jean Valjean

Russell Crowe

Inspector Javert

Anne Hathaway

### Fantine

Amanda Seyfried  
Cosette

Eddie Redmayne

Marius

Aaron Tveit

Enjolras

Samantha Barks

Eponine

Isabelle Allen

young Cosette

Daniel Huttleston

Gavroche

Colm Wilkinson

bishop

Helena Bonham

### Carter

Madame Thenardier  
Sacha Baron Cohen  
Thenardier

### Dolby 7.1/

DTS/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

### Distributor

Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Ireland

**Digne, France, 1815.** Released from prison after 19 years' hard labour, and inspired by a bishop's mercy, Jean Valjean tears up his parole papers and resolves to become a different person.

Eight years later, Valjean, now using a different name, is a factory owner in Montreuil-sur-Mer and is the town's mayor, but he is still distracted by his dogged pursuer Inspector Javert. When Fantine, one of the factory workers, is unfairly dismissed, she turns in desperation to prostitution and falls ill; Valjean intervenes as Fantine is about to be arrested by Javert, and promises the dying woman that he will protect her daughter Cosette. Valjean confesses his identity to prevent an innocent man being punished in his place, recovers Cosette from larcenous guardians Monsieur and Madame Thenardier, and flees.

Paris, 1832. As his fellow students call for revolution,

Marius falls for Cosette. Valjean and Cosette go into hiding from Javert. When the funeral of people's champion General Lamarque turns violent, the students build a barricade and take Javert hostage. The Thenardiers' daughter Eponine, also secretly in love with Marius, dies in his arms. Valjean joins the students to protect Marius, and mercifully releases Javert. As the students are massacred, Valjean carries unconscious Marius into the sewers. After letting Valjean go, Javert kills himself for breach of duty.

Valjean departs so that Cosette will not be compromised by his criminal history. On their wedding day, Marius and Cosette learn from the Thenardiers that Valjean is in a convent. There, Valjean gives Cosette a confessional letter, and dies. At the successful 1848 Revolution, the ghosts of Valjean, Fantine and the students triumphantly haunt the barricades.



## Playing for Keeps

USA 2012

Director: Gabriele Muccino

Certificate 12A 105m 36s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The sexual and professional second acts of washed-up Americans relegated to suburban obscurity are the topic of Gabriele Muccino's third American film (his first without Will Smith after *The Pursuit of Happyness* and *Seven Pounds*). Foremost among these casualties is former football star George Dryer (Gerard Butler, permitted for once to use his natural accent). Often absent in his heyday, the now unemployed George is estranged from ten-year-old son Lewis (Noah Lomax, credibly intense as an easily hurt, quick-to-anger young boy) and ex-wife Stacie (Jessica Biel).

Watching Lewis's soccer-squad practice, George becomes fed up with the non-existent coaching and takes over. Reluctant though he is to assume this task on a regular basis, he's guilt-tripped into it by Stacie – "When was the last time you did something for Lewis?" she fumes. Robbie Fox's script is full of similarly bluntly skeletal dialogue, not least from the sexually carnivorous suburban moms who swarm over George. "You're not the only one who used to be somebody, coach," purrs former sportscaster Denise (Catherine Zeta-Jones), who helps him film a demo which she passes along to the right people at ESPN. In return she expects no-strings-attached intercourse: George obliges once but declines a repeat, explaining that this represents his maturity and commitment to fatherhood.

Also in the mix is Barb (Judy Greer, deserving better), whose first two conversations with



Away game: Jessica Biel, Gerard Butler

George end in crying fits. When she makes it over to his house, she flirts by showing him her Match.com dating profile ("Sweet & Sassy"). Barb stays the night but largely leaves George in peace afterwards. Finally there's Patti (Uma Thurman), wife of the team's cash source Carl (Dennis Quaid, uncharacteristically crazed). Patti comes to George's house and anticipatorily strips to her lingerie in his bed — or rather, that of his landlord Param (Iqbal Theba), leading to ostensible farce as she flees.

There's an obligatory stab at *Bad News Bears*-style comedy during George's first official day as coach, surrounded by kids making embarrassing familial disclosures, but on-field action is scanty — perhaps a tacit recognition of the fundamentally unthrilling nature of athletic competitions for ten-year-olds. When not lust-driven, the parents are typically over-concerned, bribing George for playing time for their kids or asking if their weeklong-constipated offspring can be excused from strenuous exertion. Perhaps satire of helicopter parenting was intended, but it doesn't come off.

Cartoonish sexual dynamics aside, George's attempts to win Stacie back form half the film's queasy emotional core. He's not above using their mutual obligation to their son as a wheedling reason to reunite. Biel, typically, looks pinched and unhappy throughout, and justifiably so: her ex is indeed playing for unfair keeps. Comparatively, the father-son relationship is handled in conventional family-movie terms: distracted by a flirtatious phone conversation, George misses one of Lewis's goals, prompting his son to scream that he hates him. As in all such movies, an absent dad must learn to place family before career, regardless of what that means financially. (George generically cites "the economy" as the main culprit for his decline.) Personal and professional redemption (in the form of sportscasting, the dream job of many American males) must be declined for the greater moral good, which miraculously leads back to the deferred goal.

Alternately cartoonishly lustful and embarrassingly mawkish, *Playing for Keeps* demonstrates the same sense of unearned masculine self-pity as Muccino's 2001 film *The Last Kiss*, filtered through a thoroughly 1990s Hollywood sensibility. Perhaps there's an element of cruel self-awareness in surrounding Butler with actors whose box-office draw peaked long ago, a subtextual reminder of the difficulty of starting over on a smaller scale. But given that Butler comes off like a Scottish Pepé Le Pew ploughing through endless willing conquests, any such intention is lost. **S**

## The Punk Syndrome

Finland/Norway/Sweden 2012

Directors: Jukka Kärkkäinen, J-P Passi

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Films revolving around mental disabilities generally fall into three categories: the exploitative, the confrontational and the sympathetic. Jukka Kärkkäinen and J-P Passi's documentary about Finnish punk band Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät ('Pertti Kurikka's Name Day') deftly sidesteps the first and strains every sinew to fit the second, but, much like Rolf de Heer's tonally similar (if fictional) *Bad Boy Bubby* (1993), it's ultimately surprisingly moving almost despite itself.

In subject-matter and structure, *The Punk Syndrome* initially seems all but identical to *Heavy Load* (2008), Jerry Rothwell's documentary about the eponymous Sussex band whose members, like those of Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät, have assorted learning difficulties. However, while Rothwell went to considerable lengths to respect his subjects' dignity, *The Punk Syndrome* is take-no-prisoners from the start, when drummer Toni Väitalo's toilet hygiene is challenged just before he goes on stage. Later, bassist Sami Helle refuses to let vocalist/lyricist Kari Aalto borrow his computer to surf the web for porn; it transpires, in one of many expectation-undermining moments, that Kari is merely after practical tips, since his relationship with girlfriend Sirkka is getting serious.

The band's irrepressibly catchy songs range from Ramones-style three-chorders consisting entirely of repeated refrains like "It was a Sunday/I went to church/I had coffee/I took a dump" to more elaborate denunciations of the way in which disabled people are marginalised by both officialdom and society even in a supposedly enlightened country such as Finland. Kari's guttural bark suits the material perfectly, and the band is impressively tight given its members' various offstage tics, although guitarist/composer Pertti Kurikka does apologise profusely to a bemused crowd after messing up a riff that he himself composed.

Kari, initially the most gruffly intimidating, proves to be both a romantic and a sensualist — for all the unexplained vitriol he aims at pedicurists in his lyrics, he seems to find the actual pedicure experience positively ecstatic. He has a volatile relationship with Sami, whose activism for the conservative Centre Party echoes Johnny Ramone's support for Reaganite Republicans and whose attempts at weightlifting provide a slapstick interlude. Pertti, the most introspective, wrestles with personal demons through the pages of his meticulously hand-printed diary. Toni, the youngest, is the most uncomplicatedly good-natured: his response to a romantic setback is to sing a karaoke love song to himself. What characterises all four is their inability to censor themselves. Devotees of the comedy of embarrassment will find much to relish here, though there's ultimately no especial difference between their matter-of-fact bluntness and the attitude on display in a Sex Pistols interview circa 1977 — which may be the film's central point.

The treatment is classic fly-on-the-wall, with no context-setting titles or narration. There's no backstory (the film's website reveals that the band was formed in 2009 at a

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jonathan Mostow  
Kevin Misher  
Gerard Butler  
Alan Siegel  
Heidi Jo Markel  
John Thompson

#### Written by

Robbie Fox

#### Director of

Photography

Peter Menzies Jr

#### Editor

Padraic McKinley

#### Production

Designer

Daniel T. Dorrance

#### Music

Andrea Guerra

#### Sound Mixer

Steve C. Aaron

#### Costume Designer

Angelica Russo

#### Film District

presents in

association with

Millennium Films

A Misher Films/York

Square Productions/

Eclectic Pictures/

Gerard Butler

Alan Siegel

Entertainment/Nu

Image production

A Gabriele

Muccino film

#### Executive

Producers

Peter Schlessel

Avi Lerner

Danny Dimbort

Trevor Short

Ed Cathell III

Boaz Davidson

#### Cast

Gerard Butler

George Dryer

Jessica Biel

Stacie

#### Uma Thurman

Patti

Catherine

Zeta-Jones

Denise

Dennis Quaid

Carl

Judy Greer

Barb

James Tupper

Matt

Noah Lomax

Lewis

Iqbal Theba

Param

#### Dolby Digital/

Datasat Digital

Sound/SDDS

In Colour

2.35:1 [Super 35]

#### Distributor

Lionsgate UK

9,504 ft + 0 frames

US, the present. Unemployed and in debt, former soccer star George Dryer has settled in Virginia to be near his ex-wife Stacie and ten-year-old son Lewis. George is appalled by the poor coaching of Lewis's soccer team. Asked to take over as coach, he is reluctant until Stacie convinces him that this is a good way to get closer to his son. George sleeps with the mothers of two players and declines the advances of a third. His sportscasting demonstration tape wins him a job with ESPN, which requires a move to Connecticut. George tries to convince Stacie to leave her fiancé and join him with Lewis, but she declines. After packing up and leaving town, George changes his mind and returns to be with his son. Stacie reveals that she has broken off her engagement.



**Big Finnish: Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät**

culture workshop for disabled people), and Finnish audiences don't need to be told that the politician conversing with Sami at one point is the then prime minister Mari Kiviniemi. No one gets significant screen time outside the band's immediate circle, and there's not much narrative shape: they perform a few concerts, release a single (on seven-inch vinyl, naturally) and end the film much as they began it, though during a casual 11th-hour conversation with their heroically dedicated manager-mentor Kalle Pajamaa, Pertti realises that he has lost his stutter. Although the film generally bears little resemblance to the work of Aki Kaurismäki (the man who, rightly or wrongly, embodies Finnish cinema in the eyes of British distributors), common ground is finally established with this gently understated happy ending. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Sami Jahnukainen  
**Scriptwriters**  
Jukka Kärkkäinen  
J-P Passi  
Sami Jahnukainen  
**Cinematography**  
J-P Passi  
**Editing**  
Riitta Poikselkä  
**Music**  
Pertti Kurikan  
Nimipäivät  
**Sound Design**  
Lars Jørgen  
Bergsund

©Mouka Filmi, Indie  
Film, Auto Images,  
Film i Skåne  
**Production  
Companies**

Mouka Filmi  
presents in co-  
production with Auto  
Images, Indie Film,  
Film i Skåne a film  
by Jukka Kärkkäinen  
and J-P Passi  
Produced by  
Mouka Filmi  
With support from  
The Finnish Film  
Foundation,  
Esek - The Finnish  
Performing Music  
Promotion Centre,  
Luses - The  
Foundation for  
the Promotion of  
Finnish Music,  
Norwegian Film  
Institute, Swedish  
Film Institute,  
Nordisk Film

& TV Fond  
In association with  
YLE, SVT, NRK  
**Film Extracts**  
Naida vaj palaa  
(1989)

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
November Films

Finnish theatrical  
title  
**Kovaskajuttu**

**Finland, circa 2010-11.** Kari Aalto (vocals/lyrics), Pertti Kurikka (guitar/music), Sami Helle (bass) and Toni Väitalo (drums) comprise Pertti Kurikan Nimipäivät ('Pertti Kurikka's Name Day'), a punk band that sings raucously autobiographical songs about living with learning difficulties. Pertti is obsessed with clothing seams, Kari has a love-hate relationship with pedicurists, Sami campaigns for the conservative Centre Party, while Toni still lives with his parents. In between enthusiastically received concerts, Kari becomes engaged to his girlfriend Sirkka, Toni considers moving into special accommodation (though designs on potential neighbour Liisa are stymied by her revelation that she has a boyfriend), Sami loses his trousers during a weightlifting contest, and Pertti is emotionally overwhelmed by the birth of manager Kalle Pajamaa's first child. The band members record their debut single and promote it via a radio interview. They are invited to a presidential reception. Kalle observes that Pertti no longer stammers.

## The Sessions

USA 2012  
Director: Ben Lewin  
Certificate 15 94m 53s



**Bedside manner: Helen Hunt, John Hawkes**

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's certainly refreshing to see a film where the pursuit of sexual intercourse carries the connotations of a heroic quest rather than the usual low comic har-hars. Where the Steve Carell character in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* had shyness, performance-anxiety and an action-figure collection standing between him and his manly destiny, for journalist and poet Mark O'Brien the practicalities are just that bit more daunting. Although he's 38 when the story unfolds, polio at the age of six has left him paralysed from the neck down and dependent on an iron lung which he can only leave for three or four hours at a time. Desire still courses through his veins, however, causing some messy incidents at bed-bath time, and when a news agency

commissions him to write an article on 'seeking a sex surrogate', it proves the catalyst for his subsequent encounters with a sexual therapist who takes a decidedly hands-on approach.

Most viewers will previously have been unaware that O'Brien was indeed a real person (the action takes place in 1988) and may also possibly be new to the very idea of sexual surrogates – professional healthcare workers whose services allow clients to experience sexual intimacy in a controlled environment, which they can then take into their own relationships with future partners. Veteran Polish-Australian writer-director Ben Lewin's serio-comic treatment of this true-life material benefits from a relatively candid approach that's in no way prudish about the ins and outs of coupling for

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced By**  
Judi Levine  
Stephen Nemeth  
Ben Lewin  
**Written for the  
screen by**  
Ben Lewin  
Based on the  
article *On Seeing  
a Sex Surrogate*  
by Mark O'Brien  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Geoffrey Simpson  
**Editor**  
Lisa Bromwell  
**Production Designer**

John Mott  
**Music**  
Marco Beltrami  
**Sound Mixer**  
Marty Kasparian  
**Costume Designer**  
Justine Seymour  
  
©Twentieth  
Century Fox Film  
Corporation and  
Dune Entertainment  
III LLC (in all  
territories except  
Brazil, Italy, Japan,  
Korea and Spain)  
©TCF Hungary Film

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Company, Twentieth  
Century Fox Film  
Corporation and Dune  
Entertainment III LLC  
(in Brazil, Italy, Japan,  
Korea and Spain)  
**Production  
Companies**  
Fox Searchlight  
Pictures presents  
in association with  
Such Much Films  
and Rhino Films  
Made in association  
with Dune

Entertainment  
**Executive Producers**  
Maurice Silman  
Julius Colman  
Douglas Blake

#### Cast

**John Hawkes**  
Mark O'Brien  
**Helen Hunt**  
Cheryl  
**William H. Macy**  
Father Brendan  
**Moon Bloodgood**  
Vera  
**Annika Marks**

Amanda  
**Rhea Perlman**  
mickvah lady  
**W. Earl Brown**  
Rod  
**Robin Weigert**  
Susan  
**Blake Lindsley**  
Dr Laura White  
**Ming Lo**  
clerk  
**Jennifer Kumiyaya**  
Carmen  
**Rusty Schwimmer**  
Joan  
**James Martinez**  
Matt

**Adam Arkin**  
Josh

**Dolby Digital/  
Datasat/SDDS**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox  
International (UK)

**8,539 ft +8 frames**

Berkeley, California, 1988. Now in his late thirties, Mark O'Brien is paralysed from the neck down by the effects of childhood polio and is dependent on an iron lung that he can only leave for three or four hours at a stretch. In spite of this, he's a university graduate, writes poetry and works as a journalist, yet still longs to lose his virginity since his sexual organs are very much operational. A commission to write an article about seeking a sex surrogate sharpens his resolve, and after receiving approval from his unconventional priest Father Brendan, he engages the services of housewife Cheryl. She's a dedicated professional who enables her clients to experience sexual intimacy before seeking further

partners of their own, and she sets a limit of six sessions to forestall any emotional dependency. Mark overcomes his trepidation in the course of their encounters, eventually achieving brief penetrative intercourse while also falling in love with Cheryl, who's touched by his affections and moved by a poem he sends to her. Realising the professional perils of continuing, she suggests that they finish after the fourth session, which leaves Mark bereft in the short term but later gives him the confidence to approach Susan, the hospital doctor who treats him after a life-threatening power outage. They go on to share fulfilling years together until Mark's death, and at his funeral she reads the poem he sent to Cheryl.



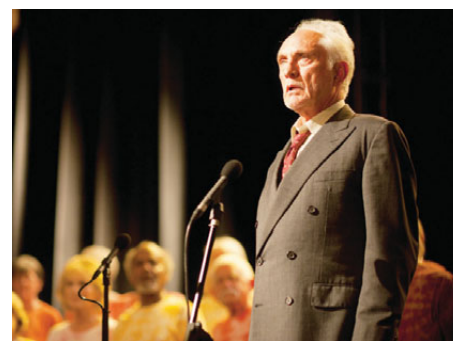
## Song for Marion

United Kingdom/Germany 2012  
Director: Paul Andrew Williams  
Certificate PG 93m 29s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Veteran viewers of British choirmaster Gareth Malone's choral TV transformations will already be primed for tears and triumphs in Paul Andrew Williams's saccharine but emotionally charged comedy drama about an elderly couple whose lives are changed by a seniors' choir, 'the OAPZ'. In fact, *Song for Marion* was inspired (very visibly, for those who've seen both films) by the 2007 retirees-sing-rock documentary *Young@Heart*, whose themes Williams has woven into a determinedly heartwarming drama.

Kicking off with 'the OAPZ' entering their first choral competition, *Song for Marion* has the familiar whiff of the British performing-will-save-us comedy familiar from *The Full Monty* (1997) or *Brassed Off* (1996). But since the film is actually about the choir's role in cancer patient Marion's last weeks and in her husband Arthur's emotional redemption, it never really succeeds in fleshing out the other choir members, using



Mourning has broken: Terence Stamp

them chiefly for comic effect. For a 'grey pound' movie aimed at older audiences, it's perversely keen to paint Marion's fellow choristers as frolicking figures of fun, warbling 'Let's Talk About Sex', headbanging to Motörhead and slipping a disc while robot-dancing.

Far better realised is Marion and Arthur's silver-haired love story, which Vanessa Redgrave and Terence Stamp make fiercely believable. Fighting over her wish to use her remaining time at the choir, comforting one another's night fears, they bring the relationship to touching life. Two of cinema's great 1960s beauties, they retain an impermeable, rangy glamour, even in bifocals and cardigans, but also bring a stoical, sweetly ordinary tone to their exchanges. Their relationship has a stripped-down naturalness which utterly eludes the stereotypical family feud and choral capers that the script packs around it. Nonetheless, it's a deeply sentimental portrait of the end of life. Watching Arthur kiss his wife's hands tenderly as he gives her a bed-bath or listens intently to her death rattle, it feels like the anti-*Amour*.

Writer-director Williams, who followed 2006's gritty *London to Brighton* with less striking horror outings, has a gift for pleasingly simple dialogue but struggles to keep the film's thin plot going once Redgrave's warm and stubborn Marion is despatched. Arthur finds solace in song with implausible rapidity, and the narrative descends into manufactured twists and his predictable emotional transformation. Still, having Stamp and Redgrave sing, risking the public humiliation their characters fear while essaying 'True Colours' or 'How Do You Speak to an Angel' in tuneful if insubstantial voices, gives the film a pleasing poignancy that *Quartet*, for example, lacks.

It's down to Stamp, his face impassive as a cigar-store Red Indian, to carry the movie and invest it with some dignity. The film plays on his ability to unbend subtly a proud character, eliciting both comedy and pathos. Fuming silently at the choir's cavorting or bickering coldly with his son (Christopher Eccleston, matching him deftly in weary resentment), he is the sustained, enjoyably bittersweet note in an otherwise sugary piece. He pulls off the last scene, a shamelessly tearjerking onstage serenade to his dead wife, with extraordinary élan. His game, cracked rendition of Billy Joel's AOR 'Lullabye (Goodnight, My Angel)' – eyes shut, fists clenched – had a screening full of hardened critics crying as if their dog had died. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Ken Marshall  
Philip Moross  
**Written by**  
Paul Andrew Williams  
**Director of Photography**  
Carlos Catalan  
**Editor**  
Daniel Farrell  
**Designer**  
Sophie Becher  
**Composer**  
Laura Rossi  
**Supervising Sound Editor**  
Srdjan Kurpel  
**Costume Designer**  
Jo Thompson

©Steel Mill (Marion Distribution) Limited  
**Production Companies**  
Aegis Film Fund, Northern Film & Media, ERDF, One and Solutions for Business & EM Media present a Paul Andrew Williams film  
A Steel Mill Pictures

production in association with Coolmore Productions, Film House Germany AG  
A co-production with Egoli Tossell Film AG  
In association with Aegis Film Fund and with Northstar Ventures & EM Media  
Developed with the assistance of BBC Films, Pathé and BFI Film Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Alistair D. Ross  
Tara Moross  
Christian Angermayer  
Marc Hansell  
Judy Tossell  
Tim Smith  
Paul Brett  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein

**Cast**  
Terence Stamp  
Arthur  
Gemma Arterton

Elizabeth  
Christopher Eccleston  
James  
Vanessa Redgrave  
Marion  
Anne Reid  
Brenda  
Barry Martin  
Timothy  
Taru Devani  
Sujantha  
Elizabeth Cunnell  
Cheryl  
Ram John Holder  
Charlie  
Denise Rubens  
Marge  
Arthur Nightingale  
Terry  
Jumayn Hunter  
Steven  
Orla Hill  
Jennifer

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
El Films

8,413 ft +8 frames

England, present day. Elderly cancer patient Marion collapses while singing with her much loved community choir, 'the OAPZ'. Doctors tell her that she has weeks to live. Her devoted but grumpy husband Arthur, who disapproves of the choir, grudgingly helps her rehearse for an upcoming choir competition. At a triumphant OAPZ concert, she sings a romantic solo directed to him. Shortly afterwards, Marion becomes very ill. Arthur cares for her at home and is devastated when she dies. Arthur breaks off contact with his son James, with whom he has long been in conflict. Arthur is befriended by choir mistress Elizabeth, and reveals that he can sing. He joins the choir but quits after James refuses to forgive him. Appearing very late for the choir competition, Arthur says that he wants to sing a solo. The OAPZ are asked to leave the competition because the organisers disapprove of their rock repertoire – but Arthur gets the choir to storm the stage and they give a triumphant performance. His son and granddaughter have come to see him perform. Arthur falters during his final solo, but recovers after his granddaughter cheers him on. The OAPZ win third place. Arthur is reconciled with his family.

the physically impaired but avoids getting too voyeuristically forensic about the minutiae. Perhaps inevitably, a slight sense of self-conscious daring surrounds the whole enterprise, but its factual basis and intriguing subject-matter blend with a certain breezy humour to make it substantially less cringe-making than many a worthy disability-based celluloid undertaking.

Believable performances are, of course, a crucial component in pulling off such a risky enterprise, and here they're extremely well judged. Startling to think that John Hawkes, in this instance a scrawny figure awkwardly curved over a gurney and doing most of his acting from the neck up, was previously seen as the white-trash meth-dealing heavy opposite Jennifer Lawrence in *Winter's Bone* (2010). His slightly strangled vocal inflections lend O'Brien's character a touching sense of everyday striving from the moment we first see him at home in his iron lung, but Hawkes's work is never so attention-seeking that it becomes a mere actor's display piece. Helen Hunt, who's suffered that familiar actress's fate of slipping off the Hollywood A-list as she hits the far end of her forties, is so good here it's almost a rediscovery, and the way she shades her therapist character's brisk professionalism with just enough practised warmth to put latest client Hawkes at ease is really something of a marvel. Add another splendid turn from William H. Macy, amiably relaxed as the unconventional priest who gives Hawkes's decision to lose his virginity outside marriage a sincere if unofficial go-ahead ("In my heart I feel like He'll give you a free pass on this one") and there's certainly plenty to amuse and engage.

Somehow, however, for all its positives, this undeniably endearing piece never really cuts loose with a full-on rendering of the emotional spectrum that O'Brien himself must have experienced. True, the film gives us some sense of the guilt O'Brien feels about his parents having to give up their lives to care for him, and there's a suggestion that this may have inculcated a certain shame about his sexuality. But ultimately it looks as though Lewin has made a deliberate decision not to go too deep lest the unleashed pain overwhelm the viewer – something underlined by his repeated, increasingly intrusive strategy of interrupting the real-time flow of the sex-surrogate sessions by cutting to O'Brien's post-encounter discussions with his priest. Since Lewin himself came through his own bout of polio and in his 66th year still gets around with the help of crutches and a leg brace, it can't be for lack of knowledge of the territory. The formal sensibility on display is, though, somewhat foursquare, televisual and dialogue-driven, and even if the desire to let the story speak for itself and keep the filmmaking out of the way is understandable, set this beside the likes of, say, Julian Schnabel's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007) and it's as if all the chutzpah it must have taken to get the story into production gave way to caution when it came to assembling it on film. For all that's admirable about *The Sessions*, you do still wonder how even more extraordinary it might have been if a tad more aesthetic brio had been involved. ☹

## So Undercover

USA 2011  
Director: Tom Vaughan  
Certificate 12A 94m 0s

### Reviewed by Anna Smith

Going undercover at college is nothing new for US comedies: Drew Barrymore did it in *Never Been Kissed* (1999), Tommy Lee Jones rather more awkwardly in *Man of the House* (2005). Now it's the turn of former child star Miley Cyrus, unconvincingly cast as a tomboyish private eye who must glam up to pass as a vacuous sorority girl for an FBI assignment.

Nothing in Cyrus's lacklustre performance indicates that her character Molly is an astute detective, and screenwriters Steven Pearl and Allan Loeb rarely assist. Molly quickly detects that a doctor is having an affair with a student, but constantly blows her own cover by talking about motorbikes instead of lip gloss (the latter a consistently insulting stereotype of female college students). The plot offers a couple of belated twists, but this is a low point for *Starter for 10* director Tom Vaughan, who fared better even with 2008's *What Happens in Vegas*. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Tobin Armbrust Nigel Sinclair Tish Cyrus Steven Pearl Allan Loeb	Entertainment <b>Executive</b> <b>Producers</b> Rob Cowan Jodi Zuckerman Weiner Andy Mayson Guy East Chris Miller Ari Pinchot Matthew Salloway Randy Manis	<b>Colour by</b> Technicolor [2.35:1]
<b>Written by</b> Allan Loeb Steven Pearl <b>Director of Photography</b> Denis Lenoir <b>Film Editors</b> Michael Berenbaum Wendy Greene Briemont <b>Production Designer</b> Daniel B. Clancy <b>Music</b> <b>Composed by</b> Stephen Trask <b>Production Mixer</b> Richard Shexnayder <b>Costume Designer</b> Wendy Chuck	<b>Cast</b> <b>Miley Cyrus</b> Molly <b>Jeremy Piven</b> Armon <b>Mike O'Malley</b> Sam <b>Josh Bowman</b> Nicholas <b>Kelly Osbourne</b> Becky <b>Eloise Mumford</b> Sasha <b>Megan Park</b> Cotton <b>Lauren McKnight</b> Alex Patrone <b>Autumn Reeser</b> Bizzy <b>Alexis Knapp</b> Taylor <b>Matthew Settle</b> Professor Talloway	<b>Distributor</b> Warner Bros. Distributors (UK)  <b>8,460 ft + 0 frames</b>
©Kappa Undercover Pictures LLC <b>Production Companies</b> Exclusive Media Group/Crystal City Entertainment present a Scarlet Fire Entertainment production in association with Hope Town	<b>Dolby Digital</b>	

New Orleans, the present. Molly works as a private eye with her ex-cop father. She is recruited by 'FBI agent' Armon to go undercover in a sorority house at the University of Southern Louisiana. Her mission is to identify a threat against student Alex, whose father is due to testify against the Mafia. Molly poses as new transfer Brooke and befriends Alex, spying on the sorority girls and presenting her suspicions to Armon. The latter suggests that Molly's new friend Nicholas is spying on Alex; Molly believes the culprit to be Professor Talloway. After an attack on Talloway, Molly discovers that he is an FBI agent, and Armon a rogue spy trying to use Molly to find Mafia ledgers kept safe by Alex. FBI agents warn Molly off but she leads Armon to fake ledgers and he is arrested. Alex gives Molly the real ledgers. Molly passes them to the FBI in return for her father's rehiring. Molly and Nicholas become an item.

## UFO

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Dominic Burns  
Certificate 15 101m 4s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

At the mid-point of this low-budget invasion picture, reliable Julian Glover – the only actor who does an accent appropriate to the film's northernish setting – appears as a garage owner who helpfully delivers a précis of the artilleryman's speech from H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, at once predicting and relishing the extermination/subjugation of humanity. He also gives a nod to the 1960 *Twilight Zone* episode 'The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street', in which a flying-saucer sighting causes a small community to turn on itself as it looks for infiltrators. The point of that Rod Serling-scripted anti-McCarthy allegory was that fear and suspicion are enough to overthrow society without any death-rays being unleashed – as *UFO* demonstrates with dog-eat-dog supermarket looting. In this case, however, the invaders make doubly sure by actually sending infiltrators to kill random humans, with an odd predisposition for kickboxing inspired by the presence of guest star Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Following *Airborne*, writer-director Dominic Burns seems to be specialising in 1970s TV-movie-style genre fare. *UFO* is a modest achievement, flawed by some jittery direction (meaningless flashforwards and shaky-cam) and rote performances (Sean Pertwee rants as the doomsday monger who is proved right, Sean Brosnan gets a variation on the Samuel L. Jackson/*Deep Blue Sea* sudden exit), but it's not without its paranoid kick. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Alain Wildberger <b>Producers</b> Dominic Burns Tim Major Andy Thompson <b>Written by</b> Dominic Burns <b>Director of Photography</b> Luke Bryant <b>Editor</b> Richard Colton <b>Production Design</b> Felix Coles <b>Music</b> Si Begg <b>Sound Recordist</b> Jake Whitelee <b>Costume Designer</b> Zoe Howerska <b>Visual Effects</b> Konstantinos Koutsoliotas	<b>Executive Producers</b> Joe Pia Craig Tuohy Rafael Quintian Greg Larsen Howard Reeve  <b>Cast</b> <b>Bianca Bree</b> Carrie <b>Sean Brosnan</b> Michael <b>Simon Phillips</b> Robin <b>Maya Grant</b> Dana <b>Jazz Lintott</b> Vincent <b>Joey Ansah</b> police officer/ black ops soldier <b>Sean Pertwee</b> tramp <b>Julian Glover</b> John Jones, petrol station attendant <b>Jean-Claude Van Damme</b> George	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Revolver Entertainment  9,096 ft + 0 frames
©Springwood Ltd <b>Production Companies</b> Hawthorn Productions presents a film by Dominic Burns		

Northern England, the present. SAS officer Michael picks up American Carrie in a nightclub, while his friends Robin (who has just proposed to long-time girlfriend Dana) and Vincent get into a fight with the bouncers. The next morning, the power goes off all over the country and giant spaceships appear in the sky. As the armed forces make a futile attempt to engage the enemy, Michael and friends travel across country to hook up with George, a paranoid survivalist. Carrie turns out to be an alien infiltrator; she kills Michael. The rest of the group panic and die.

## V/H/S

USA 2012  
Directors: various  
Certificate 18 116m 3s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

The mushrooming of 'found footage' horror is only partially explained by the opportunities it offers for cost-cutting and potentially matching the legendary cost-to-profit ratios of the form's breakthrough hits, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007). After all, films such as *Cloverfield* (2008) and *Chronicle* (2012) mimic a *ciné-vérité*/video-diary aesthetic but use relatively pricey, sophisticated CGI special effects. The first and last episodes of inexpensive anthology film *V/H/S* also ambitiously segue from handheld improv chatter into rushes of striking, effects-augmented horror, although the project is slightly compromised by the fact that its independently conceived stories have basically the same twist ending.

*V/H/S* consists of found-footage-style episodes made by different writer-director teams. Its framing story, 'Tape 56', is directed by Adam Wingard (*A Horrible Way to Die*, *You're Next*) and written by Simon Barrett (*Dead Birds*, *Frankenfish*); 'Amateur Night' is written and directed by David Bruckner (co-director of *The Signal*); 'Second Honeymoon' is written and directed by Ti West (*The House of the Devil*, *The Innkeepers*), the most established of the group; 'Tuesday the 17th', the only episode that alters the footage because its supernatural villain

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Brad Miska Roxanne Benjamin <b>Anthology</b> <b>Concept by</b> Brad Miska Gary Binkow  ©8383 Productions <b>Production Companies</b> Magnet Releasing & The Collective in association with Bloody Disgusting presents a Magnet Release <b>Executive Producers</b> Tom Owen Zak Zeman  <b>Tape 56</b> <b>Directed by</b> Adam Wingard <b>Produced by</b> Simon Barrett Kim Sherman <b>Written by</b> Simon Barrett <b>Cinematographers</b> Adam Wingard Andrew Droz Palermo Michael J. Wilson <b>Editor</b> Adam Wingard <b>Art Directors</b> Lanie Faith Marie Querton  <b>Cast</b> <b>Calvin Reeder</b> Gary <b>Lane Hughes</b> Zak <b>Kentucky Audley</b> Rox <b>Adam Wingard</b> Brad  <b>Amateur Night</b>	<b>Directed by</b> David Bruckner <b>Produced by</b> Linda Burns David Bruckner <b>Written by</b> David Bruckner Nicholas Teosky <b>Director of Photography</b> Victoria K. Warren <b>Editor</b> David Bruckner <b>Art Director</b> Raymond Carr  <b>Production Company</b> A Wasteland Pictures presentation  <b>Cast</b> <b>Hannah Fierman</b> Lily <b>Mike Donlan</b> Shane <b>Joe Sykes</b> Patrick <b>Drew Sawyer</b> Clint <b>Jas Sams</b> Lisa  <b>Second Honeymoon</b> <b>Directed by</b> Ti West <b>Produced by</b> Peter Phok Ti West <b>Written by</b> Ti West <b>Editor</b> Ti West <b>Production Designer</b> Graham Reznick  <b>Cast</b> <b>Joe Swanberg</b>	Sam <b>Sophia Takal</b> Stephanie <b>Kate Lyn Sheil</b> girl <b>Graham Reznick</b> local DJ  <b>Tuesday the 17th</b> <b>Directed by</b> Glenn McQuaid <b>Produced by</b> Glenn McQuaid Lee Nussbaum <b>Producer</b> Alex Kuciw <b>Written by</b> Glenn McQuaid <b>Camera</b> Eric Branco <b>Editor</b> Glenn McQuaid <b>Art Director</b> Roger Vianna  <b>Production Company</b> A Landing Site production  <b>Cast</b> <b>Norma C. Quinones</b> Wendy <b>Drew Moerlein</b> Joey <b>Jeannine Yoder</b> Samantha <b>Jason Yachanin</b> Spider  <b>The Sick Thing That Happened to Emily When She Was Younger</b> <b>Directed by</b> Joe Swanberg <b>Produced by</b> Simon Barrett <b>Written by</b> Simon Barrett <b>Photographer</b>
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shows up as a blur on video, is written and directed by Glenn McQuaid (*I Sell the Dead*); 'The Sick Thing That Happened to Emily When She Was Younger' is directed by Joe Swanberg (*The Zone, Silver Bullets*); and '10/31/98' is by the Radio Silence collective (Matt Bettinelli-Olpin, Tyler Gillett, Justin Martinez, Chad Villella).

There is some variety, with the urban night-crawling of Wingard, Bruckner and Radio Silence contrasting with the sunnier country trips of West and McQuaid and with Swanberg's recorded Skype conversation. But the individual stories tend to step over each other. 'Tape 56' features a bunch of frat-thug videographers whose regular gig is ripping the clothes of passing women to snatch partial nude footage for a porn market. Similar groups appear in 'Amateur Night' and '10/31/98', whose leads find that doing the right thing isn't always good for you.

Almost all the films see male callousness punished by women who seem to be victims but turn out to be monstrous. (Again, there is a range of types.) The recurrence of this theme is probably down to the limitations of the short-story format rather than any zeitgeist-chasing – though the production of the film might count as some sort of poll of how this particular group of young, male, up-and-coming writer-directors see the world or fit their vision into the subgenre. **S**

Adam Wingard  
Editor  
Joe Swanberg

**Cast**  
Helen Rogers  
Emily  
Daniel Kaufman  
James

**10/31/98**  
Directed by  
Radio Silence  
[i.e., Matt Bettinelli-Olpin, Tyler Gillett, Justin Martinez,

Chad Villella]

**Produced by**

Radio Silence

**Written by**

Radio Silence

**Cinematography**

Tyler Gillett

Justin Martinez

**Editors**

Matt Bettinelli-Olpin

Tyler Gillett

**Cast**

Chad Villella

Chad

Matt Bettinelli-

**Olpin**

Matt

Tyler Gillett

Tyler

Paul Natonek

Paul

**Dolby Digital**

**In Colour**

[1.85:1]

**Distributor**

Momentum Pictures

**10,444 ft +8**

**frames**

A group of criminals breaks into an isolated old house to steal a valuable VHS tape. In the house, they find a corpse and a stash of tapes. The tapes contain the five stories we see, and each time a tape is watched, one of the criminals disappears...

Shane and Patrick set up their friend Clint with camera-concealing glasses so that they can chronicle a wild night. They pick up two girls, Lily and Lisa, but Lily turns out not to be human and kills all three.

Married couple Sam and Stephanie document their cross-country trip. Sam doesn't notice a woman stalking them. Finally the stalker stabs Sam to be with her girlfriend, Stephanie.

Wendy takes three friends into the country, where she previously survived an encounter with a supernatural serial killer. She lets the monster murder her friends as part of her plan to lure him into a trap, but he kills her too.

College student Emily and her boyfriend James communicate by Skype. Emily claims that she is haunted. However, James isn't in fact at a remote location but is carrying out an experiment, incubating aliens inside her.

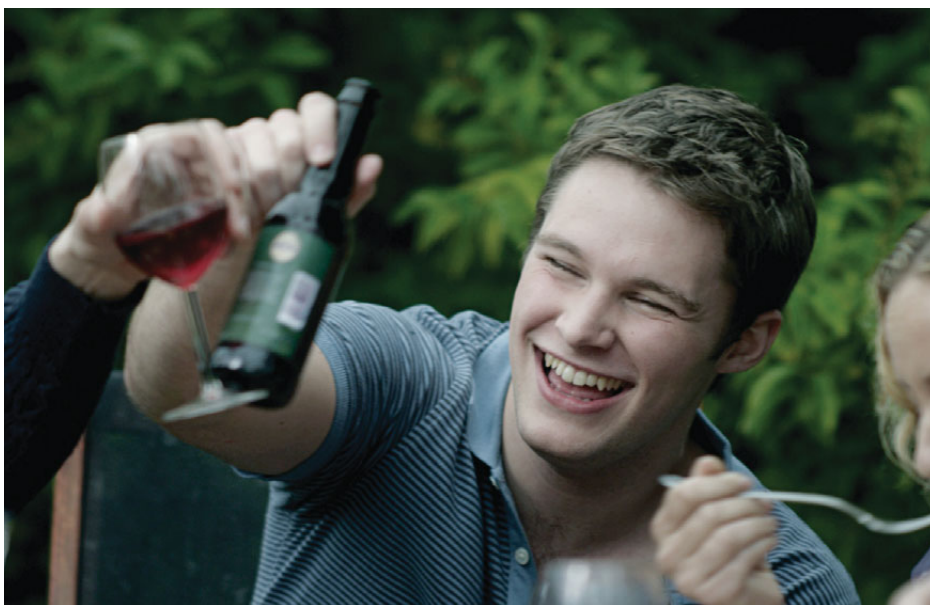
Friends Chad, Matt, Tyler and Paul go to a Halloween party but arrive at the wrong house. They find a cult seemingly sacrificing a young woman. They rescue the woman, a demon who leads them to their deaths.

## What Richard Did

Ireland 2012

Director: Lenny Abrahamson

Certificate 15 87m 31s



All kicking off: Jack Reynor

See Feature  
on page 46

**Reviewed by Hannah McGill**

**Spoiler alert: this review gives away a plot twist**

Lenny Abrahamson previously directed the startlingly bleak black comedy *Garage* (2007) and the mordant two-hander *Adam & Paul* (2004), both scripted by Mark O'Hallorhan. This solemn urban melodrama, adapted by Malcolm Campbell from Kevin Power's 2008 novel *Bad Day in Blackrock*, keeps faith with the sadness of the two previous films but dispenses with their near-surreal humour. Conspicuously talented and socially adept Irish 18-year-old Richard (Jack Reynor) is enjoying a final summer of hedonism

before a glowing future of pro rugby and university. But a crush on Lara (Róisín Murphy) derails him; when she displays continued affection for her ex-boyfriend, no Iago is required to stir Richard to dangerous levels of jealousy.

With its beautiful, well-turned-out teens thrust into the midst of messy tragedy, the plotting here rather resembles a very straight-faced episode of a teen soap like *Hollyoaks* or *Skins*. There's also a sobering real-life spur: Power's novel drew inspiration from the case of Brian Murphy, kicked to death by school friends outside a Dublin nightclub in 2000. Another narrative reference point is the classical *noir* plot in which overwhelming love

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**

Ed Guiney

**Written by**

Malcolm Campbell

Based on the

book *Bad Day in*

*Blackrock* written

by Kevin Power

**Director of**

**Photography**

David Grennan

**Editor**

Nathan Nugent

**Production Designer**

Stephanie Clerkin

**Music**

Stephen Rennicks

**Sound Mixer**

Paddy Hanlon

**Costume Designer**

Leonie Prendergast

©Element Pictures

Limited

**Production**

**Companies**

Element Pictures

and Bord Scannán

na hÉireann/the

Irish Film Board

present a film by

Lenny Abrahamson

Developed with

the assistance

of Bord Scannán

na hÉireann/the

Irish Film Board

Developed with the

support of the MEDIA

Programme of the

European Union

Made in association

with RTÉ

Produced with

the support of

investment provided

by the Government

of Ireland

**Executive Producer**

Andrew Lowe

**Cast**

Jack Reynor

Richard Karlén

Róisín Murphy

Lara

**Sam Keeley**

Conor Harris

Lars Mikkelsen

Peter Karlén

Fionn Walton

Cian

Gavin Drea

Stephen

Liana O'Leirigh

Clodagh

Rachel Gleeson

Eimear

Patrick Gibson

Jake

Lorraine Pilkington

Katherine Karlén

Gabrielle Reidy

Eileen Harris

David Herlihy

Brendan Harris

Mella Carron

Sophie Kilroy

Padraic Delaney

Pat Kilroy

Michelle Doherty

Liv

Tom Hickey

priest

**Dolby Digital**

**In Colour**

**Distributor**

Artificial Eye Film

Company

**7,876 ft +8 frames**

Ireland, the present. Eighteen-year-old rugby champion and academic star Richard is having one last summer of hedonism with his friends before going to university. Welcoming the new rugby players into the senior squad, Richard arranges a party weekend for them and their girlfriends in the coastal area where his family has a beach house. He drives there with his friends Jake, Stephen and Cian. On a drunken night out, he rebuffs an advance from his friend Sophie, but is drawn to Lara, who's dating his teammate Connor. Back home, in a bid to see Lara again, he drags his friends to Connor's birthday party in a shabby venue. Richard arranges a date with Lara and they make love; things go well between them initially, but her remaining interest in Connor makes Richard insecure. At another party, a drunk and

angry Richard drags Lara away from a conversation with Connor; Connor follows and Richard beats him up, assisted by Stephen and Cian. They leave him alive but badly injured. In the morning Richard hears on the radio that Connor's body has been found. He, Stephen, Cian and Lara agree to lie to the police. Richard, tormented, confesses to his father, who sends him away to the beach house until the police are off the scent. When Richard returns, the rugby team meets to toast Connor. Richard goes to a party and seduces Sophie in front of Jake, whom she's been seeing. Connor's mother makes an appeal at his funeral for the townspeople to speak up about what they know about his death. Richard goes home with Lara; he decides he's going to hand himself in, but in the morning seems to have changed his mind.

for a woman sends a hitherto upstanding man into moral freefall – but Lara isn't half as knowing as the prototype femme fatale. Indeed, in the early part of the film, she looks to be less powerful than Richard – from a lower social class and (by heavy implication) Catholic to his Protestant, she seems shyly baffled when the golden boy approaches her.

But it's Richard, childishy unaccustomed to not getting what he wants, who falls head over heels, especially when Lara pays attention to her ex, Conor. Conor too is from a less salubrious side of the tracks, and Catholic; Richard's friends turn up their noses when persuaded to attend his birthday party in a shabby Gaelic Athletic Association clubhouse. Conor pointedly nicknames Richard 'super-Rich', clearly aligning him with the beneficiaries of Ireland's short-lived economic boom, and likening Richard's merciless treatment of him to the impact of moneyed self-interest on the poor. The sole offer of help comes to Richard from his Danish father (Denmark helped to bail Ireland out with a €400 million bilateral loan in 2010). Tellingly, the film frames this approach not as a reliable lifeline but as temptation to retreat further from hope; Richard's father doesn't help him to do the right thing but encourages him to sidestep justice.

Justice doesn't lie in wait for Richard as it would in a soap or a *noir*; indeed, what seems to scare him most is neither what he's done nor the potential punishment but the possibility that he'll get away with it. When Richard cries, it's not just his own culpability that's breaking his heart but the moral black hole opened by the collusion of those around him: his best friends and girlfriend, who cover for him; his father, who packs him away to the family holiday home like a mafia don arranging a safe house, implying that his shining future shouldn't be sacrificed for the sake of one such as Conor. Buried under the swagger in Reynor's skilled performance is the angst of a spoiled child who would like nothing better than the certainty of being told off.

Richard doesn't kill out of affectless blankness as in *The Outsider*, nor as a result of some tortured Nietzschean thought experiment as in *Crime and Punishment*; his is a drunken *crime passionnel*, a rush of blood to the head. But his moral crisis after the event is as minutely examined as that of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, and ultimately as mysteriously inconclusive as that of Camus's Meursault. Was this ostensibly sweet and charming teenager a time bomb of destructive machismo waiting to blow or an ordinary boy in the wrong place at the wrong moment? Does he, as he suffers and vacillates over what he's done and what might happen because of it, feel the weight of moral responsibility or just the threat of punishment?

Whatever the film's level of direct political allegory, it's an interesting analysis of the idea of responsibility and its performances impress, building from the unobtrusive to the painfully nuanced and intense. The trouble is that the brief running time doesn't feel brief. As smoothly shot as a classy ad, slow-moving and short on spark, *What Richard Did* compels with its sensitivity and technical diligence, but crawls along in terms of onscreen energy and narrative tension. Ⓢ

## Wreck-It Ralph

USA 2012  
Director: Rich Moore

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"What's going on in this candy-coated heart of darkness?" wonders Wreck-It Ralph, the dungaree'd villain of 30-year-old arcade game *Fix-It Felix Jr*, in Disney's new animated film.

The most straightforward answer to Ralph's question is nostalgia. For as this existentially anxious wannabe hero emigrates from his own 1980s coin-op platformer to the newer, more graphically violent first-person shooter *Hero's Duty*, and then on to the richly coloured (and flavoured) 1990s racer *Sugar Rush*, we are being invited to take an affectionately rose-tinted gaze back at the arcade games played over the previous generation, and to survey how videogaming has transformed in the intervening years. Ralph may start off disgruntled because he always has to be the bad guy, but in the end he'll go back to where he began, instilled with a new sense of professional pride and happy to embrace his (and his film's) status as "retro – which I think means we're old but cool".

There is also a more complicated kind of nostalgia here for the world of Disney, which, not unlike the saccharine-seeming kingdom of *Sugar Rush*, has been rocked over the decades by internal wrangling and external rivals and has had to evolve to survive. Accordingly, while glitchy *Sugar Rush* character Vanellope may in the end have her princess's crown and pink dress restored, this modern girl prefers her utilitarian civvies and a 'constitutional democracy', in what is an unmistakable upgrade of the studio's traditional values.

The year 2012 marked the 30th anniversary not just of the fictive *Fix-It Felix Jr* but also of Disney's *TRON*, a semi-CG feature similarly concerned with the off-console lives of arcade-game avatars (and directly evoked here by the look of the beacon tower in *Hero's Duty*). Yet times and tastes have shifted since the 1980s, and *Wreck-It Ralph* showcases an epoch-leaping range of animation styles, from Ralph's own flat 8-bit world to the full 3D intensity of *Hero's Duty*, the cloying kaleidoscope of *Sugar Rush* and the stylised photorealism of a gaming arcade – all as good-looking as anything from Pixar (which of course Disney now owns).

Still, while children gawp at the (sometimes literal) eye candy and laugh at jokes about 'vurping' (vomiting and burping), there is more going on in *Wreck-It Ralph* for older viewers than mere *Scott Pilgrim*-style gaming nostalgia. For the film's virtual worlds occasionally admit the odd shard of reality: gaming villains

### Sweet as pie



attend AA-style meetings to address their inner anguish at having to be evil on repeat play; in their downtime, in-game soldiers suffer post-traumatic stress disorder; and unplugged games create homeless digital refugees. Meanwhile the proletarian Ralph's questioning of his exclusion from a bourgeois apartment building (after three decades of committed service) reflects the social immobility and polarisation of these straitened economic times – and the film's resolution of this problem comes with in-built contradictions of its own.

Ralph ultimately knuckles down for the same old wrecking routine out of a renewed sense of what he calls duty – and yet, as earlier puns from Vanellope have revealed, 'duty' sounds alarmingly like 'doody'. Same shit, different day: the perfect metaphor for the way *Wreck-It Ralph* rings the changes on videogames, animation and familiar storylines set in inventive microcosms. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Clark Spencer	<b>Enterprises, Inc.</b>	<b>Ed O'Neill</b> Mr. Litwak
<b>Screenplay</b> Phil Johnston Jennifer Lee	<b>Production Company</b> Walt Disney Animation Studios	<b>Dennis Haysbert</b> General Hologram
<b>Story</b> Rich Moore Phil Johnston Jim Reardon	<b>Executive Produced by</b> John Lasseter	<b>Edie McClurg</b> Mary
<b>Edited by</b> Tim Mertens	<b>Voice Cast</b>	<b>Raymond S. Persi</b> Gene/Zombie
<b>Art Director</b> Mike Gabriel	<b>John C. Reilly</b> Wreck-It Ralph	<b>Jess Harnell</b> Don
<b>Original Score</b> Composed by Henry Jackman	<b>Sarah Silverman</b> Vanellope von Schweetz	<b>Dolby Digital/ Datasat</b> In Colour [2.35:1]
<b>Sound Designer</b> Gary Rydstrom	<b>Jack McBrayer</b> Fix-It Felix Jr.	<b>Some screenings presented in 3D</b>
<b>Visual Effects Supervisor</b> Scott Kersavage	<b>Jane Lynch</b> Sergeant Calhoun	<b>Distributor</b> Buena Vista International (UK)
<b>Animation Supervisor</b> Renato Dos Anjos	<b>Alan Tudyk</b> King Candy	
	<b>Mindy Kaling</b> Taffyta Muttonfudge	
	<b>Joe Lo Truglio</b> Markowski	

For 30 years, Ralph has played the building-wrecking bad guy in arcade game 'Fix-It Felix Jr'. Ostracised and unwelcome, he leaves Nicetown for the newer first-person shooter 'Hero's Duty', hoping to win a medal and acceptance. There he encounters the game's leader, Sergeant Calhoun. Attacked by a Cy-Bug, Ralph rockets into cutesy racing game 'Sugar Rush'. Discovering that the destructive Cy-Bug has escaped too, Sergeant Calhoun joins Felix to help clean up Ralph's mess. Meanwhile the Vanellope, a glitchy pariah in 'Sugar Rush', promises to return the medal she 'borrowed' from Ralph if he helps her design a kart and win the race. Ralph builds Vanellope a practice racecourse in her volcano hideout. Persuaded by King Candy that, if Vanellope wins, her visible glitches might lead to the game being unplugged, Ralph wrecks Vanellope's new kart.

Ralph learns that King Candy had previously deleted 'Sugar Rush's' leader and erased everyone else's memory; only Vanellope's victory can reset the game. With her kart now fixed by Felix, Vanellope races, even as Cy-Bugs start devouring 'Sugar Rush'. King Candy is unmasked as Turbo, a character from another game who has usurped the 'Sugar Rush' throne. While fighting King Candy (who has morphed with a Cy-Bug that ate him), Ralph smashes the volcano's peak, destroying the Cy-Bugs, and is saved from falling by Vanellope. The game resets. Vanellope is revealed to be 'Sugar Rush's' princess. Ralph happily returns to duty in Nicetown. Felix and Calhoun marry.



# new wave *films* on DVD



'It's simply glorious – giddy and pulse-quickenning...swooningly romantic...Pure magic.'

**Tim Robey, The Daily Telegraph**



'It's a gem: gentle, eccentric, possessed of a distinctive sort of innocence – and also charming and funny.'

**Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian**



'A delirious celebration of story and the cinematic imagination...in its delicate, even rather shy way, it's the most joyously odd and surprising film of the year.'

**Jonathan Romney, Independent on Sunday**



'This sublime Portuguese fantasia... a melancholic monochrome masterpiece... a rhapsodic pageant of death, desire, dashed romance... and crocodiles.'

**David Jenkins, Little White Lies**



## Tabu

Miguel Gomes

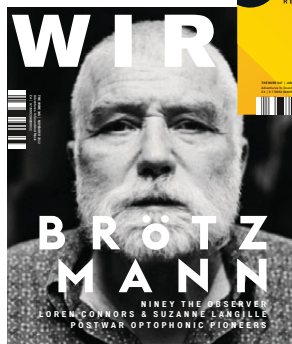
This critically acclaimed follow-up to *My Beloved Month of August* is a diptych starting off in present day Lisbon where Teresa Madruga gives a luminous performance as a woman concerned about her neighbour Aurora's eccentricities, which then jumps back to Aurora's past in colonial Africa, where she had a delirious love-affair. This second part is made as a quasi-silent film, with no dialogue, just music and voice-over that uses and slyly comments on all the techniques of cinema. A truly virtuoso film with a soundtrack that ranges from Lisztian piano accompaniment to cover versions of Phil Spector, *Tabu* is just a delight. Not to mention the sad and melancholy crocodile...

**Available 14 January on DVD, Blu-ray and download**

● The DVD and Blu-ray include two shorts by Miguel Gomes: *A Christmas Inventory* and *31 Means Trouble*.

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# Home cinema



The innocents: Georges Poujouly and Brigitte Fossey in 'Jeux interdits', one of cinema's most perceptive portrayals of childhood

## GOING OFF THE RAILS

At the outset of his career, René Clément seemed set to become one of France's major directors. Then a decline set in...

### JEUX INTERDITS

France 1952; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 85/83 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1/1.33:1; Features: featurette, alternative opening and ending

### GERVAISE

France 1956; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 112 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

### THE DEADLY TRAP

France 1971; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

### AND HOPE TO DIE

France/Canada 1972; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 135 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Between the glories of French cinema in the 1930s (Renoir, Vigo, Carné/Prévert, Feyder) and the rise of the *nouvelle vague* in the late 1950s, it sometimes seems as if a reputational

black hole has opened up. Melville, Bresson and Tati have held their own; but several of the French directors whose careers began in that long intermission (Becker, Franju, Clouzot) are still underappreciated. René Clément might also be numbered among them, though in his case the reason for his eclipse is clear: after a strong start in the 1940s and 1950s, his career declined into a morass of indifferent international co-productions.

Like Franju, he started out making documentaries. His first feature came with *La Bataille du rail* in 1946 – a tribute to the part played by French railroad workers in the Resistance, shot on location and performed mainly by non-professionals (many of them the actual railroad workers involved). Awarded the Grand Prix at Cannes, it was widely hailed as heralding a French neorealist movement that never transpired.

Clément's next four features were unremarkable – 1948's *Au-delà des grilles*, for instance, winner of a Best Foreign Film Oscar, now looks like a pallid attempt to revive the pre-war mood of poetic realism. His reputation recovered with *Jeux interdits* (*Forbidden Games*, 1952). Like his feature debut it's a WWII subject, shot largely on location and making

powerful use of non-professionals – in this case his leads, Brigitte Fossey and Georges Poujouly, respectively five and 11 years old at the time of shooting. It kicks off with a frighteningly vivid recreation of the panic-stricken flight from Paris in June 1940 as the German forces advance on the capital. Cars, trucks, carts, bicycles struggle southwards, strafed and bombed by German warplanes. In one of these attacks the parents of little Paulette (Fossey) are killed. Cradling the dying body of her dog, the child wanders off across the fields and is found by a farmer's son, Michel (Poujouly). Instinctively protective, the boy takes her home and tends to her, warding off the objections of his family.

Trying to make sense of the anger and violence surrounding them – and by way of coping with Paulette's trauma over the death of her parents – the children invent innocent death rituals of their own, while their elders are preoccupied with a senseless feud with the neighbouring family. Deftly skirting sentimentality, Clément views events through the eyes of the children, drawing performances of exceptional veracity from Fossey and Poujouly and backing them with the plangent transparency of Narciso Yepes's solo guitar score. The film closes with an aching



sense of loss and Paulette's inconsolable cries of "Michel!" *Jeux interdits* picked up the Golden Lion at Venice and Best Foreign Film Oscar, and still stands as one of cinema's most perceptive and touching portrayals of childhood.

Despite having little English, Clément came to London to make 1954's dual-language *Knave of Hearts* (*Monsieur Ripois*), a witty cross-cultural romance with Gérard Philipe as an amorous young Frenchman cutting a swathe through the susceptible females of the British capital. Clément's portrayal of London, noted Karel Reisz, "is extraordinarily vivid and real... No British director has used London so well."

Back in Paris, Clément made his first period film, *Gervaise* (1956), adapted from Zola's 1877 novel *L'Assommoir*. Recreating in the studio, in scrupulous detail, the ambience of mid-19th-century working-class Paris, it charts the impact of alcoholism on the eponymous heroine, played a touch too winsomely by Maria Schell. Abandoned by her preening lover, father of her two sons, Gervaise finds initial happiness with an amiable roofer, Coupeau, and sets up her own laundry. But after Coupeau is injured in a fall he loses his nerve, turns to booze and drinks away the proceeds of the business. In the final scene, Gervaise's little daughter Nana sets out on the coquettish path to prostitution charted by Zola in the sequel that bears her name (filmed by Renoir in 1926).

French cinema abounds in classic scenes set around the dinner table, but the name-day party given by Gervaise, for which with great ceremony she prepares a huge goose, deserves to rank high among them. It's the key turning-point of the film, the moment at which the heroine's fortunes, hitherto precariously rising, start ineluctably to fall, and all the characters instrumental in her life are present – her boozy husband, her unscrupulous ex-lover, the man who loves her but is too honourable to declare himself, her snobby in-laws, her hypocritical nemesis (a fine portrayal of unctuous venom from Suzy Delair). Clément orchestrates the scene in masterly fashion, lacing the social comedy with psychological insights, his camera roaming and prowling watchfully around the increasingly overheated celebration. Though the film inevitably slims down the action of Zola's baggy novel, it rates as the finest screen adaptation of his work to date.

*Gervaise*, like *Jeux interdits*, was scripted by post-war French cinema's premier screenwriting team, Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost. This may explain the disdain levelled at Clément by François Truffaut, known for his visceral distaste for Aurenche and Bost's work, in his notorious *Cahiers* piece 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema'. Truffaut's mentor André Bazin leapt to Clément's defence, but from then on the director was inextricably associated with 'le cinéma de papa', even though he often worked with the *nouvelle vague*'s favourite cinematographer, Henri Decaë. Decaë was Clément's DP on 1959's *Purple Noon* (*Plein soleil*), an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr Ripley* which,



Maria Schell and François Périer in 'Gervaise'

apart from a fudged ending, compares very favourably with Anthony Minghella's 1999 remake. For critic Donald Lyons it's "the first of the great French skewings of Hitchcock... as startling, as unsettling, as unlike domestic product as any New Wave movie".

Over the next decade or so, though, Clément's work seemed to vindicate Truffaut's strictures with a series of lumbering international co-productions, such as 1966's *Is Paris Burning?* (*Paris brûle-t-il?*, 1966), nearly three weary hours long and stuffed with star cameos. The depths to which Clément's once-promising career had sunk can be gauged in *The Deadly Trap* (*La maison sous les arbres*, 1971), an ineptly plotted, sluggishly paced English-language thriller with Faye Dunaway and Frank Langella badly miscast as expat American parents in Paris whose children are kidnapped by a shadowy criminal corporation. The sole redeeming feature is a brief, suavely menacing cameo from Maurice Ronet as the head of the sinister organisation.

But Clément still had one wholly unexpected shot in his locker. His penultimate film, *And Hope to Die* (*La Course du lièvre à travers les champs*, 1972), is drawn – as was Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* – from a crime novel by David Goodis; and like Truffaut's movie, it's a disorienting mix of thriller and fantasy.

*If 'And Hope to Die' is anything to go by, there may be further unknown treasures to be unearthed in his oeuvre*



Tisa Farrow in 'And Hope to Die'

A Frenchman, Tony Cardot (Jean-Louis Trintignant), on the run from some gypsies who want revenge for his part in air accident in which several gypsy kids died, fetches up in an isolated house in the country outside Montreal. It's occupied by an ill-assorted gang of crooks: a thuggish heavy (Aldo Ray), a nurturing sexpot (Lea Massari), a gay artist (Jean Gaven), a nymphette (Tisa Farrow, younger sister of Mia) and, heading the gang, Robert Ryan in one of his last roles and already visibly ill. They're planning to kidnap a young woman who's a witness in a Mafia trial.

Received by the gang with suspicion, Tony is handcuffed, made to sleep in an infant's cot and forced to play various games to earn his food. He retaliates with games of his own and is gradually if grudgingly accepted. The dialogue is erratic; the plot makes little sense and evidently isn't meant to. The action's bookended, and occasionally interspersed, by scenes in which a young boy, newly moved to a scruffy district of Marseille, tries to make friends with a bunch of local kids; it's gradually borne in on us that the boy is Tony and the local kids are the gang, even though the ages don't match up and, Ryan apart, none of the gang members has ever been to France.

From one angle, *And Hope to Die* (the French title, 'The track of the hare across the fields', is explained in the closing moments of the film) could be regarded as a weirdly distorted version of *Jeux interdits*: the urban outsider irrupting into an alien rural household. But there are clues that point elsewhere. At the start of the film, and again at the end, we see Tenniel's image of Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat, and in *Literature/Film Quarterly* Guy Austin proposed the film as "a transposition of elements from Lewis Carroll's *Alice* stories into a doomed adult world". If so, Clément wouldn't be the first French filmmaker to be captivated by Carroll: Louis Malle's *Black Moon* (1975), Jacques Rivette's *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (1974) and Claude Chabrol's *Alice ou la dernière fugue* (1977) all drink at the same well.

Clément directed only one further film, *Scar Tissue* (*La baby sitter*, 1975), then retired from filmmaking for the last 20 years of his life, his reputation sadly devalued. But if *And Hope to Die* is anything to go by, there may be further unknown treasures to be unearthed in his oeuvre. ☺



Faye Dunaway in 'The Deadly Trap'

# New releases

## ABRAHAM LINCOLN

D.W. Griffith; US 1930; Kino Classics/Region A Blu-ray; 93 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.20:1; Features: introduction to 'The Birth of a Nation' featuring Griffith and actor Walter Huston (filmed during production)

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The first time D.W. Griffith shot the death of the 16th American president at Ford's Theatre, the role of John Wilkes Booth was played by Raoul Walsh, then a stripling of an assistant director. The film was 1915's *The Birth of a Nation* – in many respects the inverted mirror image of Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln*, which was made 15 years later, when Griffith's great career was winding down.

A crippled giant, Griffith's singular reputation may never be wholly rehabilitated, for *The Birth of a Nation* holds a unique status as cinema's first feature masterpiece and its original sin, setting a new standard for filming action with its famous ride-to-the-rescue scene starring the Ku Klux Klan. In *Abraham Lincoln*, however, the central set piece is Sheridan's ride and a great Union victory – the son of Confederate colonel 'Roaring Jake' Griffith, it seems, had been reconstructed. Partly, at least: the only extras on Kino's *Lincoln* disc are introductions meant to present a 1930 rerelease of *Birth*; these are staged conversations between Walter Huston, who stars as Lincoln, and hawk-nosed Griffith, reminiscing about his mother sewing robes for the Klan, and encouraging Huston to read Woodrow Wilson on the carpetbaggers' "veritable overthrow of civilisation in the South".

*Abraham Lincoln*'s prologue, however, movingly depicts a stormy slave-ship crossing in 1809, the year of Lincoln's birth, in which the vessel's mate indifferently reports "25 dead". This prologue is one of several scenes here in which the sound elements have gone missing. Elsewhere, *Lincoln* – Griffith's first movie shot wholly as a talkie, and his penultimate feature – exhibits early-sound clunkiness; it's a case of a movie that is often more effective viewed in 'pause', where some of the compositions take on the quality of 19th-century daguerreotypes. (Speaking of which, it is historically impossible that Lincoln would have kept a photograph of sweetheart Ann Rutledge, who died in 1835.) The especial attention given in this treatment to the young "unknown cornfield lawyer" Lincoln's courtship of the doomed Rutledge (played by Una Merkel) is unusual, but gives occasion to some pathetic images of the most touching president: Lincoln with his big paw atop the ailing Rutledge's head, or splayed across her grave in driving rain.

Griffith's film is most eloquent when speaking of suffering, and the desolate, exhausted retreat of Robert E. Lee, his knotted knuckles clenched over his camp bed, is the very image of exhausted surrender, by a filmmaker en route to his own.

**Disc:** Kino's transfer of the Museum of Modern Art restoration does conscientious work sharpening the extant print elements, although the audio, where present, remains rather thin. The only supplement is the Griffith/Huston introduction.

## LES AMANTS DE MONTPARNASSE

Jacques Becker; France 1958; Gaumont/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD; 118 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'Jacques Becker et la condition de l'artiste' documentary

### Reviewed by David Thompson

Jacques Becker's film on the last years of Modigliani's life begins with the title 'Dedicated to the memory of Max Ophuls'. This is more than just paying homage to a then recently deceased master, as *Les Amants de Montparnasse* (one of various titles given the project) was to have been directed by Ophuls. Following the commercial disaster of *Lola Montès* (1955), Ophuls worked on a lengthy script with Henri Jeanson, and had cast Yves Montand as the dissolute painter who, in line with the legend of Van Gogh, barely sold a painting in his lifetime but was declared a genius upon his death. When Ophuls died, the project passed to Becker, who at that time was having problems following up the success of *Touchez pas au grisbi* (1954), taking on studio assignments in the hope of a return to a more personal cinema. He had also begun a relationship with the young Françoise Fabian, so it is likely that the story of the struggling artist's relationship with his young muse, Jeanne Hébuterne, struck many a chord. However, the film was dogged by the intransigence of Jeanson, who objected to any changes in his script, which Becker freely adapted to his own conception. It's suggested in the documentary included on Gaumont's disc that this conflict was fuelled by Jeanson's association with the old guard of the 'cinema of quality' then being attacked by the future New Wave, who were great advocates of Becker. Jeanson's bitterness overshadowed the film, which was felt by many also to be compromised by the miscasting of Gérard Philippe in the lead role.

In truth, Philippe is not much of a match with the Modigliani remembered by his friends, but then Becker makes little of what is known about the artist – the significance of his Jewish-Italian roots (absent in the film), his fondness for opium (there is one brief reference) and his friendship and rivalry with contemporaries such as Picasso (who in Becker's script, perhaps mercifully, doesn't even pass him by on the street). What the director does create is a very studio-based vision of Montparnasse between the two World Wars, in which a *bal musette* is



Strictly ballroom: 'Dance Hall'

stirringly uplifted by the exuberant arrival of a jazz band. He also underlines Modigliani's enduring fascination for women, with Lilli Palmer as Beatrice Hastings, the masochistic English poet who entices him to slap her, and a young Anouk Aimée, with her perfectly formed Modigliani features, as the devoted Jeanne.

If the overall tone of the film is restrained and subdued to the point of being almost soporific, there is one major Becker 'touch' that finally gives energy to the piece. Lino Ventura is cast as Morel, a cynical art dealer who haunts Modigliani like an angel of death, willing him on to a fatal collapse in a foggy street so that his paintings can be purchased in the safe knowledge of their creator's demise. Even contemporary critics pointed out the tremendous force of the final sequence in which Morel visits Jeanne and begins selecting the canvases, hitherto barely visible in the film. This – and a troubling scene just before, when a sale is almost concluded with a whimsical American millionaire – give the film an emotional power frustratingly lacking in its dealings with Modigliani's personal life.

**Disc:** An immaculate transfer – too immaculate, in fact, with Gaumont's tendency to remove all the glitches and grain serving to give the film a glossy, alienating look. Subtitles are fine, but not provided on the documentary.

## DANCE HALL

Charles Crichton; UK 1950; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 77 minutes; Aspect Ratio widescreen; Features: 'Remembering Dance Hall' featurette, stills gallery

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Charles Crichton's 1950 melodrama was considered an Ealing Studios oddity for years (he himself thought little of it), concentrating as it does on the domesticity-versus-dancehall dilemmas of a trio of factory girls rather than the 'little man' of Ealing lore. An intriguing set of script credits combining Ealing's sole woman contract scriptwriter Diana Morgan, newsreel commentator E.V.H. Emmett and Alexander Mackendrick (fresh from *Whisky Galore!*) sets one wondering about who actually instigated it, ten years before *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s social realism. Feminist enquiry has rehabilitated it of late (along with Terence Davies's guilty pleasure in its lack of gloss, and the girls' implausibly cut-glass accents), since it provides a rare and even mildly questioning look at the role of working-class women in post-war Britain.

Remarkably unjudgemental about a fleeting affair or a female roving eye, it doesn't shrink from presenting housewifery as stultifying ("You just want me to stay at home and be bored, bored, bored!") despite ensuring that its heroines earn engagement rings rather than the dance trophies dangled in front of them. If dramatically without surprises, as anguished Natasha Parry pinballs between her reliable beau Donald Houston and suave womanising dance partner Bonar Colleano, the film has a low-key naturalism that's undeniably appealing. Parry and her girlfriends (a chirpy Petula Clark, a man-hungry Diana Dors, delightfully wry in her





## AWAY WITH THE FEERIES

Combining fanciful tableaux, visual trickery and lavish spectacle, the 'fairy films' of early cinema are both a puzzle and a delight to the modern eye

### FAIRY TALES: EARLY COLOUR STENCIL FILMS FROM PATHE

Pathé Frères; France 1901-08; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 156 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: newly commissioned scores by Touch artists, short films 'Au pays de l'or' (1908), Georges Méliès's 'Barbe-blue' (1901) with score by SAVX, Anson Dyer's 'Little Red Riding Hood' (1922), 'La Danse du diable' with nine alternative scores by students from Sint-Lukas Brussels University College of Art and Design, illustrated booklet

#### Reviewed by Kate Stables

The Belle Epoque phenomenon of *scènes de féeries*, those early cinema films based on the *féerie* stage spectacles of popular French theatre, are both a puzzle and a delight to the modern eye. Supreme examples of 'attractional' cinema, they are fantasy stories designed to show off the extravagant settings, dancing girls and elaborate trickery that were their *raison d'être*. As curator Bryony Dixon's wide-ranging essay accompanying this rich and fascinating collection of Pathé fairy films observes, narrative-nurtured viewers must acclimatise themselves to the supremacy of spectacle here, and to features such as the 'apotheosis', a final triumphant tableau that recalls and caps the film's splendours, in the fashion of an Olympic ceremony. Colour stencilling added to the films' otherworldly qualities, and forms a key component of their visual pleasure then and now, as attested by the changing-sunset colours rippling across the butterfly-dancer's mobile wings in 1905's *Metamorphosis of a Butterfly*, or how in *The Fairy of Spring* (1906) blush-pink buds and primrose-coloured flying bouquets lend a simple tale a sudden rush of enchantment.

Pathé had 600 women creating 'pochoir' stencil colour films in its factory by 1906, produced vast numbers of fairy films for direct sale to exhibitors, and was the market leader until the end of the decade, which coincided with the rapid decline of the *féerie* genre. Yet in critical terms, its creative output has always been seen as secondary to Georges Méliès's more innovative fairy films, his triumphant devils and dissolves prized over Pathé's conventional morality and fades-to-black. What this collection elucidates, though, is that the Pathé fairy films embrace and celebrate the theatricality of the genre in engrossing ways, while revealing much about the popular theatre of the time – these are films that are "enframed rather than emplotted" as writer Tom Gunning puts it. The glorious sets and stage machinery of *The Seven Castles of the Devil* (1901), and the lavish trickery of classic fairy film *The*



Spirit world: 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves' (1902)

*Talisman* (1907) plunge you into the morality tale or pantomime mode of contemporaneous theatre with immediacy and aplomb.

But directors like Ferdinand Zecca, Albert Capellani, Gaston Velle and Segundo de Chomón also visibly extended the uniquely filmic properties of their projects. Watching the flying stage flats of the 1902 *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, the ingenious dream-insert shot in *Cinderella* (1907) or the marvels of the sliding outdoor thickets of *Sleeping Beauty* (1908), you can see film transforming the *féerie* tradition formally, whilst amplifying the sense of wonder that is at its heart. A pity that Pathé's 1902 tableau version of *Sleeping Beauty* isn't included here, for compare-and-contrast purposes.

However, *féerie* on film is a broad catchall category, giving this chronological survey the guilty pleasure of a YouTube binge, as

*They are fantasy stories designed to show off the dancing girls and extravagant settings that were their raison d'être*



Star turn: 'La Danse du Diable'

dance acts (the flip-flopping primrose-coloured petticoats of *Eccentric Waltz* seeming rivetingly indecent) and magic-trick films such as Gaston Velle's endearingly quirky *Japonaiseries* flit past. Surrealism and the war between the sexes surface in Segundo de Chomón's pleasingly pyrotechnic *The Golden Beetle* and in his bewitchingly perverse *The Red Spectre* (both 1907), the latter's skeleton-spectre conjuring up tiny bottled women, *Bride of Frankenstein*-style. This fertile visual diversity is enhanced – depending on your taste for uncompromising electronica – by new soundtracks curated by British audiovisual collective Touch and composed by artists including Christian Fennesz and Hildur Gódnadóttir. Their eclectic approaches, sometimes employing period projector sounds or snatches of fairground noises, create a startling, often rewarding dissonance. *Weird Fancies* (1904), in which a reptilian devil conjures streams of posing beauties, gains a menacing, lubricious edge from a Leif Elggren soundtrack that sounds like animals feasting on insects.

Presented unrestored, some titles noticeably worn or missing the tops and tails of their plots, these films are shown off as artefacts as well as artworks. They are well supported by Bryony Dixon's authoritative film notes and a sprinkling of *féerie*-inflected shorts, including Méliès's chilling *Barbe-blue*. Having gorged on this box of delights, though, you are left wondering how these fairy fantasies spoke to their original audiences. Did they simply transport them? Or, as film scholar Kristian Moën has recently suggested, perhaps their transformations resonated with the unnerving mutability, the marvels and anxieties of early-20th-century urban life in a way that we could all too easily understand today. ☹

# New releases

miniscule shavings of story) inhabit a monochrome London of rainy bus queues, cramped council flats and rationing (at one point Colleano courts Parry with illicit kippers), austerity rendered faithfully, if not, as *Time Out* once remarked “as a neorealist fresco”. Douglas Sloccombe’s fleet camera, swooping acrobatically around the crowded everyday glamour of the ‘Chiswick Palais’, captures the catnip allure of the dancefloor in a drab era.

**Disc:** A nice firm transfer, which can cope with the details of shadowy trysts and night exteriors. The extras include an interview with Charles Barr on the critical rediscovery of the film (including an endearing mea maxima culpa for glossing over it in his book on Ealing Films) which proves a considerable bonus.

## EXCISION

Richard Bates Jr; US 2012; Monster Pictures/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 81 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: commentary, trailer

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

It’s strange that the fringes of horror cinema have produced two films about women with surgery fetishes in one year. Richard Bates Jr’s *Excision* and Jen and Sylvia Soska’s *American Mary* take wildly different approaches to the subject, but both are built around career-stretching performances from young, interesting actresses who manage to play credible megalomania while appearing in blood-spattered designer scrubs.

In *Excision*, teenage misfit Pauline (AnnaLynne McCord) is fascinated by her own blood (and such seldom-treated body-horror tropes as cold sores and zits) and has vivid, hallucinatory dreams that meld glamour with gore. She inhabits a bright, suburban, *Heathers*-ish world, clashing with her puritanical mother (Traci Lords), who sends her to a priest (John Waters) for counselling, and studying radical surgery in the hope that she can help her ailing sister. She also sets out to dispense with her virginity in a farcical yet pathetic manner, and veers from misfit to menace without ever losing audience sympathy.

McCord, the mean blonde stereotype in the ordinary teen horror *The Haunting of Molly Hartley* (2008), is astonishing as Pauline, attacking the role with a ferocity not seen since Reese Witherspoon in *Freeway* (1996). Lords, who has proved herself post-porn as a comedienne, is equally remarkable as an unstereotyped teen-movie mother: her reaction in the horrific final scene – when she conveys that she loves both her daughters, no matter what – is awards-quality work. Bates also finds room for cult cameos from Roger Bart, Malcolm McDowell, Ray Wise and Marlee Matlin as adults on the periphery of the heroine’s world.

**Disc:** Aside from a trailer, the sole extra is a genial commentary track from Bates and McCord, who talk through the process of making *Excision* on a limited budget but also probe lightly the wealth of thematic material offered by the movie. Oddly absent, though, is the short version of the film made by Bates several years ago.



Down and out: ‘Nowhere to Go’

## THE FUNHOUSE

Tobe Hooper; US 1981; Shout! Factory/Region 1 DVD; 96 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: audio commentary with Tobe Hooper, interviews with producer Mark L. Lester, composer John Beal and actor William Finley, theatrical trailer, TV spots

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

I am something of a connoisseur of press-kit howlers, and one of the better in memory came in the materials for *Scream 4*, which cited *Wes Craven’s New Nightmare* as “the first self-reflexive horror movie”, or something to that effect.

Everything else aside, consider *The Funhouse*, the third theatrical feature by *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* director Tobe Hooper. The film’s first half is a litany of tired horror effluvia that have lost their aura. After a credit sequence of chattering carnival animatronics, the camera scans a suburban bedroom decorated with *Famous Monsters of Filmland*-style memorabilia: toy torture implements, a *Dead of Night* ventriloquist dummy’s head, a poster of Boris

Karloff’s monster. In comes a black-gloved hand, transforming the shot into a *giallo* stalker’s POV, which then slinks towards the *Psycho* bathroom where an oblivious young woman is soaping herself. The girl is teenaged Amy Harper (Elizabeth Berridge), the hand belongs to her little brother Joey (Shawn Carson), playing a harmless prank. The message couldn’t be clearer: we’re too old for this silliness; the things that once scared us don’t any more.

With Joey tagging along unbeknownst to her, Amy heads to a funfair with her friends, the group sniggering at the corny attractions and making plans to stow away overnight in the funhouse. No genuine sense of threat pops up until nearly the halfway point – and it doesn’t need to. The film is riveting as a lived-in document of small-town aimlessness, with beautiful nocturnal photography by DP Andrew Laszlo, who, as Joey wanders the emptying fairground, pulls off a crane shot worthy of Mizoguchi.

*The Funhouse* finally turns its 180 when one of the fairground employees removes his rubber Frankenstein mask... and reveals a cleft-palated, violently imbecilic ogre beneath (hard to remember that it’s only another rubber mask). This abomination is the son of Kevin Conway’s carny barker, and both will soon turn homicidal on the invaders; the parodied family dynamic recalls *Leatherface* and household, while Hooper recycled the idea of a funfair as a front for homicidal activity in his antic 1986 sequel to *Chain Saw*. And by the time of a grinding climax in the mechanical guts of the dark ride, see how the trappings of horror discredited earlier have truly been revived, how the rubber masks have regained their fangs.

**Disc:** The principal attraction of this Region 1



**In the Mood for Love** There’s a classicism about the framing and cutting that recalls Golden Age Hollywood more than anything else in Wong’s output



release over Arrow Video's excellent, loaded special edition of 2011 is a full commentary track with Hooper, ever the raconteur.

## IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

Wong Kar-Wai; Hong Kong 2000; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 98 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: 'Hua yang de nian hua' short film, '@ In the Mood for Love' documentary, Tony Rayns video pieces, deleted scenes, interviews with Wong Kar-Wai, Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung, booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

"How should I address you?" asks Tony Leung's Mr Chow at the start of *In the Mood for Love*. "My husband's name is Chan," replies his new neighbour Maggie Cheung demurely, laying down the formal social codes that will both guide and frustrate all their subsequent encounters, their palpable hunger for each other (both physical and psychological: this is one of cinema's great studies of emotional bereavement) permanently constrained by the need to keep up appearances at all cost. As the camera constantly glides from side to side and back again, and Mrs Chan's distinctive gait (dictated by her seemingly infinite supply of *cheongsam* dresses) is mirrored by the swaying of the street lamps in the wind, the film frequently becomes more of a musical than a narrative experience, complete with tiny grace notes: an almost invisible smoke ring, a blob of yellow mustard, Mrs Chan momentarily glancing back at Mr Chow after she's passed well beyond the camera's narrow depth of field and he's looking the other way.

Last autumn, Wong Kar-Wai's seventh feature had the distinction of being the highest-placed post-2000 feature in *Sight & Sound's* decennial critics' poll – it came in at number 24, tying with Dreyer's *Ordet* and Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. Twelve years after its premiere, it feels as though it's been around far longer: there's a classicism about the framing and cutting that recalls golden-age Hollywood more than anything else in Wong's output, though it's hard to imagine an old-style studio mogul sanctioning the frequent moments when the film slows down to examine a single brief scene from every possible angle (almost invariably accompanied by the pizzicato pulse of Umabayashi Shigeru's achingly beautiful string mazurka) before the story is given another, almost reluctant, push forwards.

**Disc:** *In the Mood for Love* has had several excellent DVD editions already (Criterion, Tartan, TFI), but something that fetishises colour and texture like this really needed the superb high-definition transfer featured here. Many of the extras will be familiar from the previous Criterion edition (highlights being 'Hua yang de nian hua', Wong's video collage of fading cinematic memories, Liu Yi-chang's short story 'Intersection', and four deleted scenes, the incorporation of any one of which could easily have collapsed the whole finely balanced house of card-house), although *S&S's* Tony Rayns has recorded two fresh video contextualisations, one on the film, the other on its eclectic soundtrack.



The talented Monsieur Delon: 'Purple Noon'

## NOWHERE TO GO

Seth Holt; UK 1958; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 99 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.75:1 anamorphic; Features: retrospective featurette

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

This appears to be the first commercial release in any video medium of Ealing Studios' penultimate film. While *Nowhere to Go* is admittedly no masterpiece, it's surprising that it's been so neglected given its numerous points of genuine historical interest, not least the respective directing, screenwriting and screen-acting debut of Seth Holt, Kenneth Tynan and Maggie Smith. Even at the time the *Monthly Film Bulletin* commented that its cynicism, fatalism and downbeat ending were "strangely unfamiliar in the British cinema", and in retrospect it points the way towards the more celebrated Stanley Baker vehicles *Hell Is a City* (1959) and *The Criminal* (1960) and much else thereafter.

Far more openly inspired by hardboiled American and French thrillers than by anything in the company's back catalogue, former editor and producer Holt consciously set out to make "the least 'Ealing' Ealing film ever made". Accordingly, it starts with an eight-minute, almost dialogue-free prison breakout followed by a lengthy flashback in which George Nader's smooth-talking Canadian conman Paul Gregory blithely rips off Bessie Love's heiress after sweet-talking his way into her trust. But once the preliminaries are out of the way, the film enters more intriguing territory as Gregory falls in with Smith's cynical debutante, who for reasons only hinted at by her enigmatic smile (the script gives few clues) is the only person to stand by him after an accidental killing makes him *persona non grata* even in the criminal underworld.

Dialogue, cutting and visuals (all low angles and lowering shadows on ceilings) are admirably crisp, and one unmistakably

'Ealing' touch is that the London locations are highly recognisable without ever becoming overly touristy. Other pleasures include counterintuitive casting (avuncular authority figure Bernard Lee as a ruthless criminal), the only film score by jazz trumpeter Dizzy Reece, and some agreeably black comedic touches in the vein of Holt's former boss Alexander Mackendrick: before talking to Gregory, Lionel Jeffries's pet-shop owner gruffly informs a small boy: "You know what's the matter with this fish of yours? He's dead."

**Disc:** Like the film, the DVD transfer is a solid effort, with the presumably little-accessed source print in excellent nick. A welcome bonus is that this is Holt's original cut, assembled before theatrical distributors MGM chopped out 15 minutes for double-billing purposes. A 12-minute retrospective featurette includes contributions from Ealing historian Charles Barr, assistant director Michael Birkett and camera assistant Herbert Smith.

## PURPLE NOON (PLEIN SOLEIL)

René Clément; France 1960; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 117 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

**Reviewed by Peter Tonguette**

Perhaps it takes seeing Anthony Minghella's fattened 1999 version of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr Ripley* to fully appreciate René Clément's *Purple Noon* (*Plein Soleil*). Both films concern serial killer Tom Ripley, in whose hands a forged passport is as lethal as a knife, but Minghella's was too sequel-ready, with all its supporting characters and subplots. By contrast, *Purple Noon* gives us Highsmith's story without frills: playboy Philippe Greenleaf (Maurice Ronet) and his innamorata Marge (Marie Laforêt) find themselves saddled with Tom (Alain Delon), who claims to be an old friend of Philippe's but is really just a conman. They lollygag around Italy until Tom kills Philippe, purloins his identity and stakes claim to both his inheritance and Marge.

Unlike Minghella's film, *Purple Noon* makes no excuses for Tom's criminality. As Philippe, Ronet is suntanned and a little pudgy (it takes more physical exertion than drinking and playing cards to stay in shape), but his character remains largely sympathetic. Although he's aware of Tom's duplicity, Philippe beneficently permits him to stay on during the trio's permanent vacation, and only plays his worst trick on Tom (cutting him loose in a dinghy when they are at sea) after he has caught Tom spying on an intimate moment between him and Marge.

Clément is careful not to take pleasure in Tom's plotting and manoeuvring after he goes on the lam. It is no fun watching Tom replicate Philippe's signature or drain his bank accounts. Instead, he is dogged by images of Catholic guilt. As he fumbles with the body of his latest victim, two priests pass by to remind him of his wickedness, while Marge is seen working on a manuscript on Fra Angelico. The beautiful Laforêt is appropriately homely as Marge, a fact that reflects well on Philippe; he could have gone out with, say, Romy Schneider (seen in a cameo),



# BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS

It started out as a cynical genre cash-in, but Lucio Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters* is a triumph of technique, atmosphere and style

## ZOMBIE FLESH EATERS

Lucio Fulci; Italy 1979; Arrow Films/Region B  
Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 91 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: 'making of' documentaries, featurettes, onstage interviews, trailers, booklet

### Reviewed by James Blackford

Lucio Fulci sits alongside Mario Bava and Dario Argento as one of the foremost auteurs of Italian horror cinema but, far from being a horror specialist, Fulci, like many of his Cinecittà contemporaries, worked across several genres in his long career. The Roman director made comedies, westerns, children's adventures, horror and *gialli*, reflecting the tendency within post-war Italian popular cinema to follow shifting trends in genre and make derivative films that anticipated and exploited the tastes of domestic and international cinemagoers.

*Zombie Flesh Eaters* was born of this cash-in mode of film production. Not only was it cynically released in Italy as an unofficial sequel to George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) but its subsequent international box-office success set the agenda for Italian horror for years to come, with a raft of spaghetti zombie films (*Zombie Creeping Flesh*, *Burial Ground*, *City of the Walking Dead*) hitting grindhouse screens across the world in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Although production began on *Zombie Flesh Eaters* after the hugely successful Italian release of *Dawn of the Dead*, Fulci's film was based on a script written back in July 1978, before *Dawn*'s release. It follows Anne Bowles (Tisa Farrow), the daughter of a prominent scientist, and reporter Peter West (Ian McCulloch) on a journey from Manhattan to the fictional Caribbean island of Matul, whence Anne's father's schooner has drifted to New York carrying strange, malevolent cargo. Once on Matul they find the beleaguered Dr Menard (Richard Johnson) obsessively seeking to remedy a burgeoning zombie epidemic.

Right from its opening, Fulci's film hits different stylistic, thematic and tonal notes to the Romero movie it purports to follow. *Zombie Flesh Eaters* is an adventure-horror hybrid that eschews the sociopolitical themes and metropolitan setting of Romero's film in favour of the classical Hollywood horror tropes of white doctors, voodoo and exotic Caribbean locales. Fulci remarked: "I've always held great admiration for the marvellous horror classics made in America. Fright films such as *I Walked with a Zombie*, *Voodoo Island* and *The Walking Dead* were all in the back of my mind when I made this film." *Zombie Flesh Eaters* merges these classical horror influences with elements lifted directly from Romero: a



Worm's-eye view: 'Zombie Flesh Eaters'

zombie-apocalypse narrative, a climatic zombie siege and unconscionably extreme gore.

It's a combination that undoubtedly fails in some ways: *Zombie* lacks psychological depth; the characterisation is banal; and the leaden post-synchronised dialogue deflates the performances. But despite these failings it is a film that succeeds on its own terms as a triumph of technique, visual style, atmosphere and hyperbolic violence. During his most successful period (1979-82), Fulci was able to work with an elite crew of film-industry artisans: cinematographer Sergio Salvati, editor Vincenzo Tomassi, composer Fabio Frizzi, special-effects man Gino de Rossi and makeup artist Giannetto de Rossi. Working with this team, and thanks to his own assured technique, Fulci makes the hand of romantic craftsmanship felt in every shot of *Zombie*

*Fulci lovingly films the bloodshed and chaos with a widescreen gaze that invites aesthetic consideration*



Fulci's film creates a convincingly horrific world

*Flesh Eaters*. With its beautifully composed, stylish Techniscope cinematography, impeccable set design and art direction and thoroughly convincing makeup and special effects, *Zombie* is far more luxurious than its modest budget of under \$300,000 should have allowed. The film creates a convincingly horrific world; the Caribbean setting feels authentic and claustrophobic, with Dr Menard's fly-infested hospital (where the sweating patients slowly turn to zombies) a tangibly putrid place. The zombies themselves are disgustingly corporeal creatures that far outdo Romero's green-faced extras.

Beyond its classical pulp-horror stylings, it is the gory set pieces that have earned *Zombie Flesh Eaters* its cult status. These include a violent underwater confrontation between a zombie and a shark; a zombie impaling a woman's eye on a splinter of wood in gloating close-up; a horde of decayed Spanish conquistadors rising from their shallow graves; and a zombie-siege finale that sees throats ripped out and heads smashed in. These sequences of hyperbolic splatter achieve a thrilling level of pure horror cinema. Fulci lovingly films the bloodshed and chaos with a widescreen gaze that invites aesthetic consideration as well as demanding abject revulsion. We should be disgusted, but we're also impressed.

Arrow Video's two-disc Blu-ray edition presents a new digitally restored 2K scan of the film's original negative. Working, for the first time, from the 2-perf 35mm Techniscope negative has revealed considerably more picture area, while the overall palette appears less saturated and more natural than ever before. Although digital processing techniques have been employed to remove dirt, scratches and debris, the image preserves the complex grain structure inherent in the Techniscope process. The release also contains a hugely generous array of extras – this is the definitive edition.



# New releases

but instead has chosen the studious, devout Marge. The heavens weep when she falls for Tom at the end, but by then it matters little. Unlike Minghella, Clément wants no more of Tom Ripley, and makes clear that there will be no sequels for him in jail.

**Disc:** Criterion's restoration brings Henri Decaë's cinematography to dazzling life, and the vintage interview with Patricia Highsmith is especially insightful.

## RAMROD

André de Toth; US 1947; Olive Films/Region 1  
NTSC DVD: 95 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Last of the great one-eyed auteurist cowboys, André de Toth was a minor master of ethical relativity and moral decay in the genre film, and this western, his fifth Hollywood outing, bristles with de Tothian ambivalences. In a small, seemingly haunted ranch town run by Preston Foster's greed-monster cattle baron, Veronica Lake's newly endowed maiden takes on a man's world, despite a phalanx of dubious observers, including Joel McCrea's grieving overseer (the 'ramrod' of the title). Pressure gets exerted, beatings and killings start piling up, and it becomes a complex and covert battle for survival, complicated by betrayals, broken hearts and beleaguered idealisms thrown out with the trash.

Unceremoniously naturalistic, alternately ghostly in its emptiness and cramped with imposing humanity, the film doesn't quite feel like other westerns – de Toth took great care to keep the interiors tight and worn, the dialogue unhurried and muttered (everyone takes their cue from Lake and half-corrupt sheriff Donald Crisp – sotto voce), the relationships fluid and ruinable. McCrea, always the most innocently likeable of Golden Age leading men, is only the bland everyman here; more potent are Don DeFore's morally slippery hedonist pal, Arleen Whelan's stalwart homemaker (who barely bats an eye at the corpses and wounded), Lake's whispery wronged woman, and even Foster, whose smug venality carries traces of bitter heartbreak.

With economic strokes, de Toth limns a dizzying amount of interpersonal politics and atmosphere, and his achievements can dazzle without being self-conscious – as when a wounded McCrea hides out in a mountain cave and DeFore's fast-thinking boyo visits him; they talk like unsurprised old friends as we look out of the cave past their silhouettes, DeFore loping between the foreground and the middle to handle the coffee, scores of topics rising and falling, for more than two full minutes. The movie's visual eloquence is of a seamless piece with de Toth's deliberate modulations of script and performance, all bruisingly aggregating around a few desperate realisations about frontier sociopathy, about how romantic love can betray itself as comfort and convenience, and how justice is often lonely, dirty work with no reward.

**Disc:** A fine transfer of a grain-bedevilled vault print – which may be as it should be. It's a film that deserves its dust and calluses.



Expecting trouble: 'Rosemary's Baby'

## RED DUST

Victor Fleming; US 1932; Warner Archives/Region 1  
NTSC DVD: 83 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

A sweaty, saucy, often stagebound war of romantic wills, this classic early talkie posits a slew of seminal figures and patterns – most pervasive of which is the Hawkisan banter battleground, where men and women in extremis talk at each other as equals and as self-entertainment, before and after the sex that preoccupies their quick-moving thoughts. Hawks had nothing to do with *Red Dust*, but his signature worldview borrowed from it for years to come – the entire quadrangulated, class-conflict love-versus-fate set-up was lifted for *Only Angels Have Wings* seven years later.

The details are classic white-man's-burden edge-of-civilisation pop existentialism: an Indochinese rubber plantation, monsoons and tigers and coolies and little underwear, a sense of futility, and casual sex. Proudly pre-Code, this hothouse barely shrugs in the direction of euphemism, with Jean Harlow's bra-less on-the-run whore saying she's "not used to sleeping nights" in her business, and only misting up a little when Clark Gable pays her for a night on her back, when she was hoping "it wasn't like that at all".

Gable became Gable here, so robustly and callously macho that we, like the characters in the film, are simultaneously attracted and repelled by him, smelling his rankness and enduring his insults but seduced nonetheless by his effortless power. In the six films they made together, Harlow (all of 21 here) was seen as his yin's yang, a guileless, blazingly metallic blonde burst of radiance to offset his troubled male darkness. But the relationship was always outmatched: she's a flibbertigibbet at his disposal, with only her fearless mouth to defend her. Still, the two personas know well that they are made from the same base clay, and Gable's attempt here to intercept distracted visiting wife Mary Astor (practically melting with sexual helplessness) from her nitwit research scientist hubby Gene Raymond is merely a detour, a self-destructive folly from which he will eventually be saved by the prostitute's low-class honesty and his own surrender to destiny.

It's lovely, scratchy, mannered pulp, like its characters teetering on the edge of

propriety and saturated with the romance of having already used up your heart and deserving to be cast out into the wilderness.

**Disc:** A much needed MOD disc from an archive print, and lovely to look at.

## ROSEMARY'S BABY

Roman Polanski; US 1968; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD: 136 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: retrospective featurette, Ira Levin radio interview, 'Komeda, Komeda' documentary, booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

One of the trio of 1960s American horror films that would triangulate the genre for at least the next two decades, Roman Polanski's Hollywood debut, like *Night of the Living Dead* and *Psycho*, stands up remarkably well considering both its age and the number of ripoffs it directly and indirectly spawned. Although it's explicitly set in 1965-66 (in this and many other respects, it's doggedly faithful to Ira Levin's source novel), its relentlessly sinister fusion of pregnancy, religion and psychological manipulation by elderly male authority figures could have been torn from the 2012 Republican Party playbook – indeed, the film inspired a satirical *LA Observed* piece by Deanne Stillman last August asking whether proof of satanic impregnation would shift certain politicians' stance on abortion.

Only 23 at the time, Mia Farrow remains uncannily good as Rosemary, her impulsive mid-point decision to get a Vidal Sassoon crop making her look suddenly childlike at the most desperately vulnerable time of her life. Taking over a flat in the almost caricaturally gothic Bramford Building, she transforms an initially gloomy, oppressive interior into a bright yellow-and-cream cocoon, its decor so pale that when husband Guy (John Cassavetes) buys her a bouquet of roses, it's clear from her expression that she finds their abrupt redness as overbearing as her inexplicably sinister neighbours' constant, often deeply unwanted attention. The film is crammed with similarly unsettling details and nudging reminders that Polanski made *Repulsion* three years earlier – though with few of the earlier film's overtly expressionist conceits: by this stage in his career, he could turn a head-on shot of an empty doorway into something inexplicably petrifying.

**Disc:** The director-approved Blu-ray transfer is hard to fault, its colours noticeably richer than Paramount's old DVD. There are generous extras too, starting with an unusually interesting retrospective chinwag from Polanski, Farrow and Paramount production head Robert Evans, an archive radio interview with Levin, and a booklet showcasing an essay by Ed Park and material from Levin's notebooks (including the author's own floorplan of Rosemary's flat). But the 71-minute Polish television documentary *Komeda, Komeda* is the real treat here, offering a comprehensive portrait of Polanski's favourite musical collaborator Krzysztof Komeda through the eyes of historians, friends and colleagues, its inescapable reliance on talking heads and archive film offset by Piotr Dumala's crepuscular snippets of animation.

# New releases



## LES SOEURS BRONTE

André Téchiné; France 1979; Gaumont/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD; 120 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: 'Les Fantômes de Haworth' documentary, trailer

### Reviewed by David Thompson

In spite of its stellar casting for the Brontë sisters – Isabelle Adjani as Emily, Marie-France Pisier as Charlotte, Isabelle Huppert as Anne – André Téchiné's film about their lives never made the transition to the country it doggedly depicts in all its 19th-century gloom and cold. In essence, the narrative path here is not so different from that taken by Hollywood in its 1946 portrait of the famous denizens of Haworth, *Devotion*, which had Ida Lupino as Emily and Olivia de Havilland as Charlotte, with Arthur Kennedy as their brother Branwell. But with a higher regard for the known facts than Warner Brothers, Téchiné found problems making a narrative to match audience expectations for the lives of authors to be as turbulent and gothic as their creations. In the documentary accompanying this release, we are reminded that the Brontë sisters were very protected from the outside world by their Methodist father, and that their novels grew from their interior lives – a tough task to realise on screen. As noted by Pascal Gregory, the then up-and-coming actor cast as the unfortunate brother, studio Gaumont was less than happy that Téchiné put so much emphasis on Branwell and his desperate failure to match the success of his siblings. The film dwells on scenes of his alcoholic binges and indulgence in opium, the scrubbing-out of his face from the family portrait, his rejection by the woman he loves, and the prolonged and traumatic effect of his death. Consequently, *Les Soeurs Brontë*, reputedly severely cut down from a three-hour version, is more a tale of failure than success, and the resulting tone rarely rises above the downbeat.

In truth, Téchiné struggles to find much corresponding drama in the lives of the famous sisters, with little made of Emily's solitary walks on the moors (in trousers!) or Charlotte's masochistic endurance of her cold headmaster at the school in Brussels where she teaches. Furthermore, the glamorous nature of the actresses involved does the director no favours when we are supposed to take seriously Marie-France Pisier's constant claims to be "no beauty". British audiences will also find eccentric – not to say Franco-centric – the introduction of contemporary literary geniuses Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray (the latter played by no less than Roland Barthes) as respectively the authors of *Mugby Junction* and *Barry Lyndon*, not to mention one of the characters complaining over dinner that his lamb is overdone. For all Téchiné's desire to make "a film of extreme simplicity", with highly restrained camerawork to match, the end result is sadly dull and morbid, ultimately providing little sense of how turbulent, repressed emotions found an outlet in brave fiction.

**Disc:** A good transfer, giving full weight to the browns and greens of the English (but is it?) landscape. Although the film itself is subtitled, the accompanying documentary is not.



Mad about the boy: 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'

## SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY

John Schlesinger; UK 1971; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD; 110 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1; Features: new interviews with director of photography Billy Williams, actor Murray Head, production designer Luciana Arrighi, John Schlesinger biographer William J. Mann and photographer Michael Childers, illustrated 1975 audio interview with Schlesinger, booklet featuring essay by cultural historian Ian Buruma and Penelope Gilliatt's 1971 introduction to her published screenplay

### Reviewed by Dan Callahan

When it was released in 1971, John Schlesinger's *Sunday Bloody Sunday* was a milestone in its matter-of-fact depiction of a bisexual love triangle involving a good-hearted doctor (Peter Finch), a brittle divorcee (Glenda Jackson) and the somewhat blank young artist (Murray Head) they both share, love and project their desires upon. We watch these three working at their jobs, snacking, making do and making love, and Schlesinger takes in so much of the world around them that it seems as if anyone on screen might have a whole movie devoted to them, from Jackson's forbearing mother, played by Peggy Ashcroft, to a little punk briefly seen defacing a car, played by a 14-year-old Daniel Day-Lewis. A lot of what we see doesn't necessarily relate neatly to any particular theme or plot, so that *Sunday Bloody Sunday* often feels more like life, or like a certain strain of realist literature, than movies generally do.

The screenplay is credited solely to film critic Penelope Gilliatt, but this Criterion release of the movie makes clear in its supplemental materials that her work was substantially rewritten by Schlesinger and others. Gilliatt thought that the film's taboo-shattering kiss between Finch and Head should be done in silhouette, but Schlesinger insisted on doing the kiss in full light and without subterfuge, and it still packs a wallop, working as both an ordinary smooch between lovers and the passionate throwing down of a gauntlet for gay representation on film. Head himself, who is interviewed for this disc and is looking very well at age 66, says that as a hippie he had no problems with the kiss, but he was frustrated over his cipher-like character and repeatedly asked Schlesinger what the two older lovers saw in this boy. "Sex, dear," is what his director told him. *Sunday Bloody Sunday* is a movie that looks kindly on all the people it happens to see, and it works on the level of documentary-like observation and novelistic stream-of-consciousness, but it is also securely

based in the grand *Brief Encounter* tradition of British stoicism over romantic heartbreak.

**Disc:** The image for this film has never looked better: saturated colours really pop. Extras include interviews with Head and Schlesinger's long-time partner Michael Childers.

## W+B HEIN: MATERIALFILME 1968-1976

Wilhelm and Birgit Hein; Germany 1968-76; Editions Filmmuseum/Region 0 DVD; Features: essay booklet

### Reviewed by William Fowler

From 1967 onwards, German underground experimental filmmakers Wilhelm and Birgit Hein collaborated on a series of works that foregrounded the very materiality of film celluloid – its textures, its sprockets and its surface. While others in the UK (for example Malcolm Le Grice, a close friend) and in the States (Owen Land) also explored these qualities in the 1960s and 1970s, the Heins did so with a tactile, abrasive violence and freeform musicality that rendered their work unique.

To make *Rohfilm* (1968), one of the five titles included on this release, the Heins attached layered cut-up footage (shot and found) to clear leader and sent the thick bricolaged filmstrip spluttering through their projector, filming it off the screen as it went. They captured – and created – grimy, harsh, beautiful and organic-looking textures to which more scratches and marks would inevitably be added once the new film was projected. This and other titles, such as *Portraits* (1970), which uses deftly manoeuvred still photographs of, among others, Charles Manson, were intended to highlight the myriad reproductive processes that conventional movies go through before being 'reproduced' in the cinema. These early 16mm films by the Heins create a sort of intense, transcendental subjectivity in the viewer, not unlike the labyrinthine fictions of Jorge Luis Borges. We have to somehow negotiate and see through the various layers of process and texture to get back to the original 'true' event – whatever that might actually be.

The Heins were based in Cologne and, like Krautrock bands Can and Kraftwerk (also from the area), may well have been responding to and channelling the national psychic violence that had been wrought upon the German nation via its actions in World War II. The work is direct and often confrontational and, for the full impact, ideally seen on film. Stephen Dwoskin remembered in his book *Film Is...* that, "I thought I was undergoing a visual (and auditory) bombardment" when he saw *Rohfilm*. It's also sadly lacking in visibility in the UK, however, and as such the DVD release of the works described above plus 625 (1969), *Reproductions* (1970) and *Materialfilme* (1976) is very welcome indeed.

**Disc:** The transfers are very good and the accompanying booklet essay is helpful and thorough. Both parts of *Materialfilme* come with several new optional soundtracks, which – while surplus to requirements when the excellent Christian Michelis originals are also included – all work fine.



## ACCUSED

RSJ Films/BBC; UK 2010; Acorn Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 360 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: behind-the-scenes interviews

### Reviewed by Mark Duguid

Coming from a critic, 'formulaic' is rarely meant as a compliment. But there's nothing inherently wrong with a formula, and Jimmy McGovern's legal anthology has one of the best: each episode begins with a defendant's long, slow ascent from the cells to the courtroom and concludes with the verdict, while in between revealing the events that led to the trial.

If that implies (to those with long memories) a kind of update of interminable 1970s daytime series *Crown Court*, what's interesting about *Accused* is how far it strays from the familiar terrain of TV legal drama, with its fascination with the courtroom-as-stage and the verbal thrust and parry of learned counsels. It's not so much the law – still less its rituals and processes – that concerns McGovern, but justice, alongside the deep scrutiny of morality and motive that has been his hallmark from *Brookside* to *The Street*.

The first production from RSJ Films (McGovern's partnership with producer Sita Williams and script executive Roxy Spencer), *Accused* maintains *The Street*'s record for immersive, combative, almost unendurably intense dramas of individuals at a moral crossroads. Its uniformly outstanding scripts draw outstanding performances, from the likes of Christopher Eccleston, Mackenzie Crook, Andy Serkis and Naomie Harris. And it continues McGovern's practice of mentoring younger writers: here, Alice Nutter, Esther Wilson and relative veteran Daniel Brocklehurst.

The six stories in this first series collectively challenge the quick-judging, compassion-fatigued consensus: a hard-up plumber stumbles on a bag of gangsters' money and, fatefully, decides to keep it; a grieving mother, failed by the law, takes action against the company whose negligence killed her son; a taxi driver, beset by gambling debts and burdened with a disabled wife, becomes obsessed with a young woman; the molestation of a young girl leads to a clumsy and brutal revenge; a schoolteacher is ruthlessly punished for an extramarital transgression. The now customary McGovern controversy came with 'Frankie's Story', a gruelling tale of army bullying and suicide in Afghanistan which drew predictable cries of outrage and calls for a ban from former and serving senior officers.

**Discs:** A 'behind the scenes' short presents insightful interviews with McGovern, Sita Williams and director David Blair, who, we learn, successfully recreated the sweltering Afghanistan desert in a Bolton quarry.

## CONNIE

Central/ITV; UK 1985; Network DVD/Region 2 DVD; 668 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: picture gallery

### Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Stephanie Beacham's eponymous antiheroine chews up the scenery very nicely in this



Girl power: 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie'

often deliriously entertaining soap. After spending eight years in Greece, she returns to Blighty to find the landscape radically altered by the Thatcher boom-and-bust ethos.

Set in the cutthroat, shoulder-pad-enhanced world of the British rag trade – or the East Midlands variety anyway – the show pits the volatile parvenue's family business against the entrenched interests of Old Money as represented by Ronald Lacey (his upper-crust credentials enhanced by a blond hairdo). Connie also has trouble on the home front, putting up with minor interference from her weak-willed father and current and past lovers, while full-frontal assaults come in the massive shape of her butch, sexually voracious half-sister Nesta (Pam Ferris), who is singularly lacking in family loyalty (even their mother, a splendid and permanently unimpressed Brenda Bruce, says of her with some awe, "I've all a mother's love for you Nesta, pet, but by Christ you can be a right poisonous bitch").

The 1980s fashions are predictably diabolical but Ron Hutchinson's richly comic dialogue is always a treat and delivered with relish by a cast with a clear understanding of how to put over this kind of unadulterated tosh.

**Discs:** The all-video image is mostly presented accurately as was, even retaining the ad bumpers.

## LUCK – SEASON 1

Red Board Productions/Blue Light/HBO; US 2011-12; Warner Home Video/Region 2 DVD; 474 minutes; Certificate 15; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, 'making of' featurettes

### Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Dustin Hoffman is the thoroughbred in this series co-produced by Michael Mann and David Milch and set at California's Santa Anita racetrack. In his first recurring role for television, he plays 'Ace' Bernstein, a mobster just out of prison and hatching a revenge plan of near-Jacobean complexity to take down his evil ex-partner (played with unvarnished glee by a nimble Michael Gambon). The themes of addiction, gambling, anthropomorphism and the vagaries of good and ill fortune are anatomised through the experiences of

trainers, jockeys, agents and owners, the granular level of attention to detail neatly symbolised by an early sequence in which a racehorse undergoes a rectal examination.

Chief among the dozen or so major characters are the self-styled 'degenerates', four members of a betting syndicate led by the dyspeptic Jerry (Kevin Dunn) who live in adjoining motel rooms next to the track. Jerry's steady stream of crotchety, Runyon-esque rodomontade proves highly contagious, so that when Ian Hart (one of the quartet) tires of the invective, he archly complains that the "ballbreaking over my wardrobe is not my idea of fun and my mental adroitness is dulled by this constant negativity".

Despite a fine cast (Nick Nolte and John Ortiz as two trainers are truly outstanding), the buttoned-down emotional tone often isolates the characters in frequently unshared bouts of ecstasy or apostasy, making them occasionally hard to root for. Sadly, irrespective of what it says on the DVD cover, this equestrian drama lived up to the ironic intent of its title by being cancelled suddenly and unexpectedly after various on-set problems. A shame.

**Discs:** Technical specs are generally well up to par, with the hoofs rumbling to great effect on the surround channels. The featurettes are inconsequential filler and the two Milch and Mann audio commentaries are too laconic; a solo effort by Hoffman is much more engaged.

## THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE

TVS/ITV; UK 1978; Acorn Media/Region 2 DVD; 363 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: Muriel Spark interview, picture gallery, text biographies

### Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Muriel Spark's tragicomic masterpiece may have a slender page count but it is highly capacious, its exploration of adolescent sexual awakening, betrayal, free will, idolatry and the dangerous fascination of fascism running alongside its subtly humorous depiction of religious and social conformity in 1930s Edinburgh. Jay Presson Allen had previously refashioned it for the stage (Vanessa Redgrave starred in the West End) and for the film (for which Maggie Smith won an Oscar) before working on the 1978 TV version starring Geraldine McEwan as the radical schoolteacher. This adaptation stretches things quite considerably to fill a six-hour running time, streamlining Spark's complex time frame to create a more linear narrative, with all events now taking place in 1930, acting mostly as a prequel to the original. The result is an intelligent and handsomely mounted drama that ultimately comes down with a bad case of coitus interruptus, singularly failing to come to the point. One can only assume that further series were envisioned because, after taking hours to establish the characters from the book – and adding brand new ones to generate standalone episodes – it then virtually stops mid-sentence as Jean rejects the advances of art teacher Teddy Lloyd (John Castle in excellent form), one of the catalysts for the original novel's plot.

**Discs:** The all-video production looks surprisingly smooth and colourful on this set. ⑤



"Defeat and utter fatigue of the spirit": Burton in *'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold'*

## 'WORDS ALMOST FAIL ME'

### THE RICHARD BURTON DIARIES

Edited by Chris Williams, Yale University Press, 704pp, £25, ISBN 9780300180107

#### Reviewed by Kevin Jackson

It's probably hard for readers under the age of, say, 45 to imagine just how absurdly famous Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor were at the height of their notoriety: multiply Brad and Angelina by Wills and Kate and you might come somewhere close, but only just. Their scandalous early courtship on the set of *Cleopatra*, their personal jet planes and various houses and cars and Picassos, their yacht and huge entourage, Burton's barmy acts of conspicuous consumption – he festooned his wife with million-dollar gems at a time when a million was really quite a lot of money – plus his suicidally heavy drinking, her tantrums and illnesses, their fallings-out and reconciliations...

All of this was beadily observed by the

world's press and greedily consumed by the masses. They upstaged and outranked everyone, even kings and queens and heads of state – not bad going for a miner's son who grew up in near-Dickensian poverty. As a supporting actor once put it: "Royalty itself has been known to wait when the Burtons are around. It is a fact of nature this attraction, like the moon's effect on the tide." So in one respect, reading Burton's diaries – most of them dating from 1965, when he turned 40 – is a little like reading bound copies of old celebrity mags. Its pages are filled with the leading actors and actresses of the day, from Sinatra to Brando, and also with the likes of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the Kennedy clan, Tito and Kissinger.

But this is hardly gossip as *Heat or Hello!* would understand it, unless they brought in Jonathan Swift or Samuel Beckett as a guest editor. Burton can be gentle and appreciative, especially of his greatly loved wife; more often he is furious, derisive, scornful, disgusted. On Brando: "He really is a smugly pompous little bastard... That sober self-indulgent obese fart." On Olivier: "He really is a shallow little man with a very mediocre intelligence." On the

aristocratic set in France: "We went to the Duke and Duchess' house last night for dinner with half a dozen of the most consummate bores in Paris." The word Burton uses most often here – about once every four or five of its 700 pages, at a guess – is "idiot", closely followed by "idiocy", "stupid", "fool" and "moronic".

One of the things Burton considered most idiotic was the popular version of his career: that he had squandered his dazzling talent as perhaps the finest Shakespearean actor of his day by taking Hollywood's dollar: "I have this marvellous reputation as an actor of incredible potential who has lazed his talent away... And unless I go back to England or the National Theatre in Cardiff etc and slug away at the classics for a decade, that is the reputation I shall die with. 'Will you ever go back to your first love, the theatre?' they ask all the time. 'It's not my first love,' I snap. The theatre, apart from the meretricious excitement of the first night and the sometimes interesting rehearsals, has always bored me and reading scripts has always bored me".

Not that he found any more stimulation in his stints in front of the camera: "I loathe loathe loathe acting. In studios. In England. I shudder at the thought of going to work with the same horror as a bank-clerk must loathe that stinking tube-journey every morning and the rush-hour madness at night. I loathe it, hate it, despise, despise, for Christ's sake, it."

Less often, Burton permits himself to take a quiet, entirely justifiable pride in his artistic accomplishments, much as he hankers for other lives, as a rugby star (he never lost his passion for the game) or Oxford don. He knows that cynics were usually right in saying that he had been in far too many duds ("a vast percentage of them were rubbish and not worth anyone's attention"). But he also insists that the films he made after the supposedly corrupting marriage to Liz were greatly superior to almost everything he made in his earlier years save *Bitter Victory* (1957) or *Look Back in Anger* (1958). In 1969, he lists with unassuming contentment: "*Becket*. *Woolf*. *Spy*. *Shrew*. *Boom!* *Iguana*. *Faustus*. *Staircase*."

Posterity might not go along with this list in every point, but if you compare his performances in, say, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965) and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) with most of the forgettable things he did as a pretty boy in the 1950s, it's easy to see why Burton thought that Taylor had in fact made him a better actor, and certainly a far better screen actor. Burton knows, with the judgement of a pro, that his garden soliloquy in *Woolf* – done in a single take, we learn – is a magnificently complex piece of work; and has anyone done defeat, squalor and utter fatigue of the spirit more powerfully than he did in *Spy*?

And yet for all his love of the good things in life, from Liz's body to the everyday pleasures of the table – lots and lots of delicious meals are recorded in drooling detail – Burton was a morose man, a self-confessed misanthrope. His darker passages do not often make for



cosy reading, and some of them are like Kafka (whom Burton cites) or Dostoevsky. By the Lord Harry, though, they are compelling. If Burton is fierce about others, he seldom spares himself. "And as for Burton," he writes at the end of a rant about how dreadful and phony all his actor contemporaries are, "Words almost fail me." Note the "almost". When it came to self-accusation, he was seldom at a loss for a lacerating phrase: "I could have cut out my vile tongue with a blunt razor," he notes after one act of verbal cruelty.

Burton drives himself to despair, and on the occasions he turns his gaze outwards to the bigger world he is even more appalled: "This is the age of the abyss and any minute now or dark day we could tumble over the edge into primal chaos." The depressions grow deeper and the drinking much, much heavier. A sequence of entries from May 1975 reads thus: "Sunday 18th. Booze. Monday 19th. Booze. Tuesday 20th. Booze. Wednesday 21st. Booze. Thursday 22nd. Booze. Friday 23rd. Booze..."

Such lapses into inarticulacy are rare. Burton's prose is usually a pleasure and occasionally a delight: lucid, vigorous, full of pungent phrases and spontaneous aphorisms.

*Burton's vocabulary is deliciously recondite and dandyish: 'yclept', 'agint', 'sketted', 'sesquipedalian'*

Lucid, but far from penny-plain. His vocabulary is deliciously recondite and dandyish, embracing "yclept", "faery", "anent", "agint", "metempsychosis", "cornucopian", "stentor", "sketted", "Praetorian", "sesquipedalian", "avare" ("What a mean avare the normal Frenchman is"), "perforce", "basse", "impedimented", "serried" ("From the French verb 'serrer', he notes), "raclette", "clast", "rodomontade", "climacteric", "grapple-snapple", "termagant", "tamping" (meaning "furious") and "accoutred".

The Burton of the *Diaries* must have been a nightmare to live with at times, seething with rage even when not on the sauce, prickly, hyper-critical, bloody rude. And yet the overall impression he gives is not merely admirable but – unexpectedly – loveable. He was privately generous to a mad degree and, in his best moments, he displayed a generosity of spirit that may have been his greatest virtue. The last word should go to Burton, privately marvelling to himself at the talent of the writer whom he loved as much as he loved rugby, Shakespeare: "What a stupendous God he was, he is. What chance combination of genes went to the making of that towering imagination, that brilliant gift of words, that staggering compassion, that understanding of all human frailty, that total absence of pomposity, that wit, that pun, that joy in words and the later agony. It seems that he wrote everything worth writing and the rest of his fraternity have merely fugued on his million themes..." ☹

## NORTH KOREAN CINEMA: A HISTORY

By Johannes Schönherr, McFarland, 223pp, £63.50, ISBN 9780786465262

### Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

A dark fog of mystery enshrouds most aspects of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Beyond the fact that it produces films, we probably know less about the mysterious hermit state's cinema than its average citizen knows about that of the rest of the world. There have been books, most notably *On the Art of the Cinema*, written by the country's recently deceased Supreme Leader Kim Jong-il, published in 1973 and translated into English in 1989. Johannes Schönherr's is the first book in English to approach the subject from an outsider's perspective. It's not difficult to imagine the contrast between the two accounts.

Kim Jong-il is perhaps the only person in North Korean cinema who might qualify for anything approaching auteur status. Following his installation as the head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Korean Worker's Party in the mid-1960s, the eldest son of the country's founding father, Kim Il-sung, applied a firm guiding hand to the activities of the Korean Film Studio, the largest of several national production facilities in Pyongyang, which today contains a small museum devoted to him. Although, contrary to popular belief, he was never officially credited on any film as a producer, the notorious movie fanatic has long been extolled by the state apparatus as the driving force behind an ambitious series of works later referred to official literature as "Immortal Classics", including *Sea of Blood* (*Pibada*, 1968), and the world's longest-running film serial *Nation and Destiny* (*Minjokwa unmeong*), announced as an epic 100-episode chronicle of the nation's history upon its inauguration in 1992; the series petered out with part 62 in 2003, by which time the flagging fortunes of the industry had seen

it relegated to a non-theatrical release on the government-operated Mokran Video label.

Like the country's very first film, *My First Village* (1949) – a biopic detailing Kim Il-sung's anti-Japanese guerrilla activities that followed within months of his appointment as the first president of the newly-created North Korea, establishing a mythos that endures to this day – the "Immortal Classics" liberally blurred the lines between historical fact and fiction. Invoking such national demons as Japanese oppressors, in titles including *An Jung Gun Shoots Ito Hirobumi* (*An Jung-geun Lee-deungpakhmun-eul ssoda*, 1979), and American imperialists, in films like *Wolmi Island* (*Wolmido*, 1982), which reinterprets the 1950 Battle of Incheon, these films played a crucial role in fostering the isolationist *Juche* ideology of self-reliance and nationalism.

Surprisingly, many productions screened abroad, with the first international breakthrough, Choe Ikgyu's melodrama *Flower Girl* (*Kkotpanen cheonyeo*, 1972), the first of several to win major prizes at Karlovy Vary and many others airing on television in Eastern Bloc countries. There were other attempts to internationalise the industry, most notably the 'recruitment' of the South Korean filmmaker Shin Sangok and his actress wife Choi Eunhee in the early 1980s. Their North Korean debut, *An Emissary of No Return* (*Doraaji aneun milsa*, 1984), ushered in a brief period of light relief and eroticism before the couple escaped to Los Angeles in 1986. Then there's the Pyongyang Film Festival of Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries, established in 1987 to provide North Korean cinema with a window to the world, and still going. This has not been enough to counter the decline of both the country's fortunes and its cinematic output since the end of the Cold War, the death of Kim Il-sung, years of famine and the problematic international relations of Kim Jong-il's reign.

What form does a national film industry take in the world's only hereditary communist dynasty? Given the covertness of the regime, the inaccessibility of the films in subtitled versions and the lack of much concrete information about them, Schönherr's account does an admirable, if somewhat compromised, job of mapping the contours of an actual cinematic history that is often indistinct from the fictional history the country has fashioned for itself. Considerations of what constitutes propaganda need to take into account reception as much as intention. Having grown up in East Germany before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Schönherr is both conscious of and forthrightly resistant to the kind of message imparted by these films. For this reason, the book's strongest elements are the personal recollections of Pyongyang Film Festival, which he attended in 2000 and 2001, and an intriguing series of interviews with North Korean defectors, which grant a huge degree of insight into the tastes and viewing environments of the audiences these films are made for, and the messages they took home with them. ☹



International breakthrough: 'Flower Girl'

## THE JAMES BOND ARCHIVES

Edited by Paul Duncan, Taschen, 600pp, £135, ISBN 9783836521055

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Taschen's film archives tomes – which come with cardboard carrying-cases, resist conventional shelving and pose a genuine threat to readers' wrists – tend to showcase unquestionably high-toned film artists such as Kubrick, Almodóvar and Bergman. Yet this excursion into more trivial matters – the world of 007 – doesn't sit strangely alongside the other books.

As well as covering the 'official' film series from *Dr. No* (1962) to *Skyfall*, this also finds room for Ian Fleming's books (reprinting a *Playboy* interview with the writer published posthumously in 1964 alongside Richard

Chopping's striking, influential book-jacket designs) and the by-blow productions *Casino Royale* (1967) – a mess, to be sure, but with masterful pop-art design, as shown in sketches and stills – and *Never Say Never Again* (1983). The panoramic pages and art-book reproduction values give familiar stills and posters a new life while a wealth of designs, photographs and stills play up the visual contributions of titles designer Maurice Binder, production designer Ken Adam, poster artist Frank McCarthy and many others.

With all the illustrative material, the text still aspires to be definitive. Editor Paul Duncan braids together testimony from dozens of producers, directors, actors, technicians and other interested parties in the manner of Rudolph Grey's surprisingly influential Ed Wood biography *Nightmare of Ecstasy*. As an authorised effort, the book is circumspect about the lows – the doldrums of Roger Moore's first and last efforts and Pierce Brosnan's slow fade – but still gives a sense of the way the Bonds have kept pace with or fallen behind the times.



A force to be reckoned with: Bond in 'Skyfall'

*Sight & Sound* was the first publication to take the Bond films seriously, comparing (in an article published at the time of *Goldfinger*) their descent from Feuillade, Fritz Lang and Hitchcock to the way Fleming drew on Sapper, Sax Rohmer and Mickey Spillane. The mere existence of a luxury creation like this book confirms that, 50 years on, Bond is still a pop-culture presence to be reckoned with. ☺

## A COMPANION TO EARLY CINEMA

Edited by André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo, Wiley-Blackwell, 631pp, £120, ISBN 9781444332315

### Reviewed by Ian Christie

Just what is 'early cinema'? One of the strengths of this substantial 'companion' is that it raises the issue of definition in a variety of provocative ways. André Gaudreault, one of the editors and a prime mover in the study of this field, leads with a chapter entitled 'The Culture Broth and the Froth of Cultures of So-Called Early Cinema'. His point is that the moving-picture inventions of the 1890s, by Edison, Paul, the Lumières and many others, were no more than the 'base' for something that would only become cinema, as a 'social, cultural and economic system', over the subsequent ten or 15 years. Gaudreault was in fact responsible for popularising the idea of a 'second birth' of cinema in 1912, whose centenary was celebrated in various quarters last year, and here he speculates that we may now need to mark a third birth through digital apparatus making photographic technology no longer the essential basis of 'cinematicity'.

In contrast to this conceptual debate, archivist Paolo Cherchi Usai's contribution starts with a very precise empirical definition of what 'early film' amounts to. When the modern story of its discovery began, at the now-legendary International Federation of Film Archives meeting in Brighton in 1978, just 548 titles from 1900-1906 were available to show, and only 181 articles on this period had been published since 1949. During the 15 years after Brighton, an avalanche of 1,300 publications appeared, including the first textbooks on this new domain, and at least 4,500 films from the same six-year period were located in various archives. Festivals such as Pordenone, which Cherchi Usai helped to launch, and Bologna's Il Cinema Ritrovato would create new audiences

for early and more broadly silent-era film.

But like the other archivists represented here, Cherchi Usai wants to warn against a blind cult of 'restoration'. Early restorers almost certainly destroyed valuable historical evidence when trying to make showable versions – as indeed have restorers of architecture and painting – and while new technology makes possible remarkable feats of restoration and display, Cherchi Usai claims that "once resurrected in digital form, early cinema gains in visibility while renouncing its identity as an artwork". Less pessimistically, Giovanna Fossati, head curator at Amsterdam's new EYE Institute, calls for a better understanding of "the archival life of early film", recognising what is lost and gained as the archaeological materials move through modern conservation and display processes.

*Understanding the media revolution of the 1890s helps us understand the equivalent revolution we're living through today*



Early birds: the Lumières' 'The Arrival of a Train'

The 30 chapters gathered by Gaudreault and his Montreal-based co-editors cover many aspects of the pre-1915 period, including much that will surprise even well-versed readers (although a bibliography would have made the book a great deal more useful). Richard Koszarski reports on a remarkable 'time capsule' archive of one man's diligent filmgoing in Philadelphia between 1913 and 1917, now held by the Museum of the Moving Image in Astoria, New York, while there are detailed accounts of storefront theatre advertising (Kathryn Fuller-Seeley), the invention of cinematic celebrity in the UK (Andrew Shail), early prison film shows (Alison Griffiths), European fairground cinema (Joseph Garncratz), accompanying lecturers (Germain Lacasse) and much else.

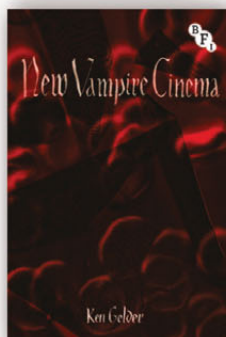
Amongst this rich diversity, very little of which comes from UK scholars, Annemone Ligensa offers a fascinating example of 'how others see us' in her chapter on sensationalism, seen from a German perspective as a historic British speciality. Going beyond the somewhat clichéd concept of a 'cinema of attractions', Ligensa shows how film continued and refreshed a longstanding tradition of sensational entertainment, and how various countries acted to muzzle this. She concludes that British censorship was actually more liberal than German, while arguing that the study of sensationalism still has much to teach us about audience preferences and assumptions about class.

One of the key claims made by early film scholars is that understanding the media revolution of the 1890s helps us understand the equivalent revolution we're living through today. Here Thomas Elsaesser, one of the pioneering early-film specialists, invokes Foucault's concept of the 'episteme', combining the technical with the psychic, to compare 1900 and 2000. What we learn from this comparison is that "cinema has always been in transition and transformation, as well as achieved and fully aware of itself."

So less talk of 'birth', 'infancy' and perhaps even 'early'? But remember to keep it strictly plural – no single history or theory is adequate to encompass this continuing story. ☺



# Read



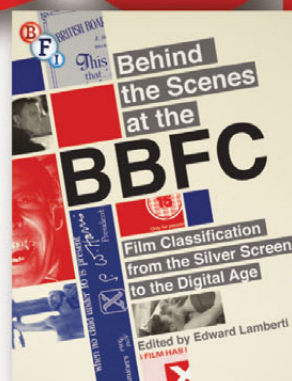
## NEW VAMPIRE CINEMA

By Ken Gelder, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 168pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99, ISBN 9781844574407  
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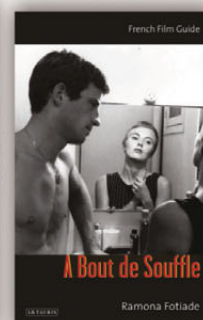
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## A BOUT DE SOUFFLE

**French Film Guide**  
By Ramona Fotiade, I.B. Tauris, 128pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781780765099  
In this original guide to the film, Ramona Fotiade analyses in depth its production and reception, as well as its *mise en scène* and editing. She situates *A bout de souffle* in relation to Godard's filmography and critical writings up to 1960, focusing on a narrative and visual discourse that is now identified with a distinctive strand in postmodern French cinema. She also explores the impact of Godard's early counter-narrative and visual strategies on independent American filmmakers and the French *Cinéma du look* during the 1980s and 1990s.  
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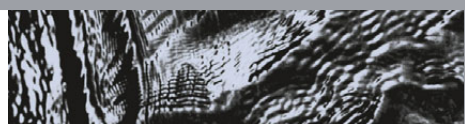
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## BIG NIGHT



Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci's culinary drama is about food, family and – as its elegant ending underlines – cinema itself

**By David Jenkins**

The literal reading of Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci's *Big Night* (1996) is that it's a film about the stifled anguish that comes with being in the restaurant game, as two Italian immigrant brothers concoct innovative local cuisine that is met with flummoxed disdain by vulgar New York suburbanites who just want to sink their teeth into a juicy steak. It's also about the tacit, unbreakable bond between brothers – between men, even – as bouts of bickering between kitchen maestro Primo (Tony Shalhoub) and his business-savvy sibling Secondo (Tucci) are naturally resolved with a primitive wordless ritual.

Another reading is that it's about comprehending and accepting the tastes of others, and the ethical dilemmas that arise when finely honed artisan skills are attuned to meet a potential consumer halfway. It's about working within a system and finding mutual benefit. One more reading, the most important, is that *Big Night* is a self-reflexive allegory about independent filmmaking – and a passionate, perspicacious one at that.

The film's title alludes to a colossal feast prepared in anticipation of a visit by exuberant musician Louis Prima. He's supposedly been invited along by Ian Holm's prattling braggadocio Pascal – proprietor of a successful but downmarket rival bistro – with the aim of giving the struggling brothers a financial leg-up. When Prima fails to show, it is revealed

that Pascal has duped the brothers in the hope that their restaurant will go bust and they will come and work for him. And go bust they do; unlike most films that chart the efforts of a plucky few to save some cherished institution, *Big Night* ends on a (grace) note of abject financial failure. But there is hope.

To truly appreciate the film's sensational final shot – an unbroken five-minute take in which Secondo prepares and cooks an omelette, which he then shares with his crestfallen brother – it's worth examining it through the prism of the disparate readings mentioned above. On a purely formal level, the shot is a rueful reverberation of one from earlier in the film, framed and executed almost identically, even down to the comic manner in which Marc Anthony's Keaton-esque waiter struts out of the kitchen, pre-empting the psychological daggers that will be clashed by his preening bosses. It's also a shot that can be appreciated in purely aesthetic and sensual terms, particularly the mellow precision displayed by Tucci as he cooks. The final gesture before a sharp cut to black sees the brothers casually, manfully embrace while keeping their eyes locked on the plates in front of them. Pomp, machismo and woe relieved by... omelettes.

Perhaps it's banal to see this ending as a commentary on the spiritual aspect of food. ("To eat good food is to be close to God," Primo says earlier.) You could see it as an expression of the idea that it's not the food you eat that

matters but the person who prepares it and the surroundings in which you consume it. The omelette itself acts as simple counterpoint to Primo's elaborate, labour-intensive creations and the climax gracefully articulates the components of a truly satisfying restaurant experience, but with none of the conventional drama. Even seeing the ending as a sentimental celebration of brotherly love and a symbolic affirmation of the pair's commitment to their staunch rustic ideals seems overly trite.

No, *Big Night* is most interestingly viewed as a film about filmmaking, with Primo as the maverick, highly principled director, Secondo his foolhardy producer and the scheming Pascal representing the crass Hollywood ideal of feeding people what they want. The film is a modest production about a modest production, its bold long last take an 'ingredient' you'd seldom find in a gaudy studio production. In filmmaking terms, the giant feast is equivalent to flash, excess, spectacle – all valued cinematic components if you've got the cash and influence to flaunt them properly. The omelette, by contrast, represents satisfying, robust results achieved via humble means. But more than anything it represents the idea that (lack of) money should not be an impediment to pure expression – that, if we look for it, there is poetry in just about anything and everything. Just as the omelette is made of eggs and seasoning, this shot – with no cuts, no tricks and just two very slight tilts – is the precise formal expression of the process it captures.

This ending recalls that of Ozu's *The Flavour of Green Tea over Rice* (1952), in which a quarrelling husband and wife rekindle a romantic spark through the simple act of preparing some rice. A metaphysical-enlightenment-through-basic-food-production double bill is surely in order. **S**

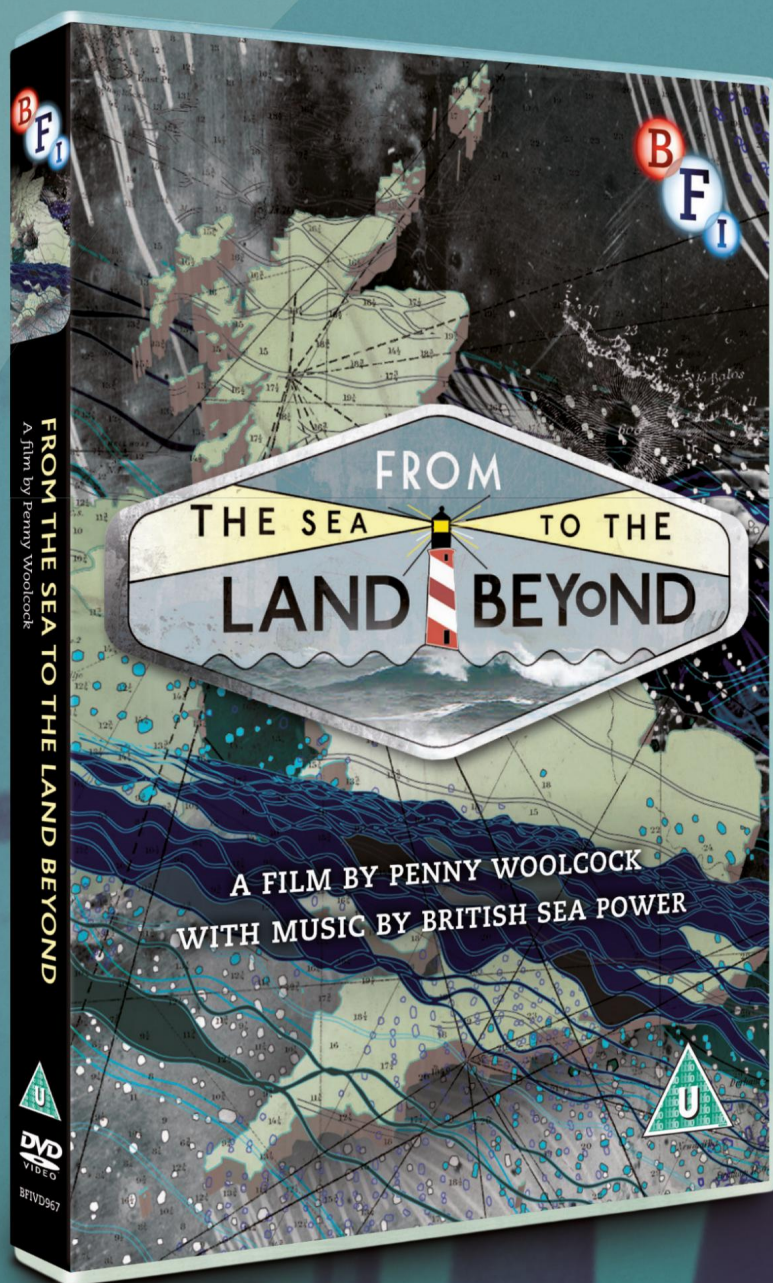
*The giant feast is equivalent to flash, excess and spectacle; the omelette represents robust results via humble means*





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